

Reducing the health risks from drinking alcohol.

In Australia, alcohol is a significant risk factor for injury and ill health, violence, crime, family breakdown, road accidents, loss of productivity in workplaces, and death.

Many people seem to understand how much alcohol they can drink to remain under the legal limits for driving, but there is still confusion about how much alcohol they can drink before it could be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

While there is no safe level of drinking, this fact sheet outlines the National Health and Medical Research Council's Guidelines¹ to help people make informed decisions about drinking and reducing the risk of harm.

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. Alcoholic drinks often contain more than one standard drink, e.g. a schooner of full strength beer is 1.6 standard drinks. Use the picture below as a guide. If you're unsure how many standard drinks your drink contains check on the label. If you're at someone's house pour your own drinks so you can keep track.

Guideline 1: Reducing the risk of alcohol-related harm over a lifetime

The more alcohol a person drinks, the greater their risk of developing an alcohol-related injury or disease during their lifetime.

Healthy men and women should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day.

If this guideline is followed, the lifetime risk of death from an alcohol-related injury or disease is less than one in 100. Every drink above this level increases the risk.

Guideline 2: Reducing the risk of injury on a single occasion of drinking

The more alcohol a person drinks on a single occasion, the greater their risk of an immediate alcohol-related injury.

Healthy men and women should drink no more than four standard drinks on any one occasion.

Drinking four standard drinks on a single occasion more than doubles the risk of injury in the following six hours. This risk increases rapidly with each additional drink.

Guideline 3: Children and young people under 18 years of age

For children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking is the safest option.

Dangerous behaviour is more likely among young people when they drink compared to when older people drink.

The brain is still developing during the teenage years and drinking alcohol during this time may damage the brain and lead to health complications later in life.

The earlier a child is introduced to alcohol the more likely they are to develop problems with it later in life.

Standard drinks chart



Guideline 4: Pregnancy and breastfeeding

For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

Drinking while pregnant can cause problems, such as bleeding, miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth.

When a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol travels through the placenta to the unborn baby. This can affect the development of the baby, including causing slowed growth and a range of physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities.

Alcohol reduces a mother's milk supply and also passes through the blood stream into breast milk. This may affect the baby's feeding and sleeping patterns, as well as its psychomotor development.

If you are concerned about your alcohol or drug use, there is confidential help available. Call DrugInfo on 1300 85 85 84 for further information.

References

1. National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). (2009). *Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol*. Canberra: NHMRC.

Additional Information

NHMRC Guidelines • www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/ds10-alcohol.pdf

Drug Facts: Alcohol • adf.org.au/drug-facts/alcohol

Information about treatment • adf.org.au/alcohol-drug-use/supporting-a-loved-one/treatment

Support Services

DrugInfo • 1800 85 85 84

ADF's free, confidential phone service, providing information and referral for alcohol and other drugs.

DirectLine • 1800 888 236

Free, confidential service offering over the phone counselling, support and referral (24 hours, 7 days a week).

ADF Help and Support Services Directory • adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory




Stay informed

 twitter.com/alcoholdrugfdn

 facebook.com/alcoholdrugfdn

Contact us

 1300 85 85 84

 adf.org.au

© Alcohol and Drug Foundation 2018

Disclaimer: The Alcohol and Drug Foundation has used its best endeavours to ensure that material contained in this publication was correct at the time of printing.

The Alcohol and Drug Foundation gives no warranty and accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of information and reserves the right to make changes without notice at any time in its absolute discretion.