



Alcohol

Alcohol consumption can affect the health and well being of individuals, families and communities. Many people put themselves and others at risk of harm through their drinking habits. The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* advise on 'low-risk' drinking habits.

How much is too much?

There is no amount of alcohol that is safe for everyone.

'Risky drinking' means drinking more than the levels recommended in the Australian Alcohol Guidelines. Even occasional heavy drinking (a binge) can be harmful.

Who are the Guidelines for?

The *Australian Alcohol Guidelines* give 'low risk' drinking levels for the general population. These drinking levels assume that the drinks are consumed at a moderate rate, spread over several hours. People who take certain medicines, have medical conditions made worse by drinking, are pregnant or breastfeeding, are less than 18 yrs old, are elderly, are frail or are underweight (less than 60kg for men or 50kg for women) should consider further reducing their drinking. Alcohol should be avoided altogether by someone about to engage in activities involving risk or needing skill (e.g., driving, operating machinery, swimming).

What do the Australian Alcohol Guidelines recommend?

Low risk drinking guidelines for the general population:		
Average number of standard drinks per day	Healthy Men	Non-pregnant Healthy Women
		4 or less
Maximum number of standard drinks per week	28	14
Maximum number of standard drinks in any one day	6	4
Number of alcohol-free days per week	1-2	1-2

What is a standard drink?

In Australia, a 'standard drink' is any drink that contains 10g of alcohol. Check out the number of 'standard drinks' found in a typical serving:

1.5 375ml Full Strength Beer 4.9% Alc./Vol	1 375ml Mid Strength Beer 3.5% Alc./Vol	0.8 375ml Light Beer 2.7% Alc./Vol	1.5 375ml Full Strength Beer 4.9% Alc./Vol	1 375ml Mid Strength Beer 3.5% Alc./Vol	0.8 375ml Light Beer 2.7% Alc./Vol	1 285ml Middy/Pot* Full Strength Beer 4.9% Alc./Vol
0.7 285ml Middy* Pot* Mid Strength Beer 3.5% Alc./Vol	0.5 285ml Middy* Pot* Light Beer 2.7% Alc./Vol	1.5 170ml Standard Serve of Sparkling Wine/Champagne 11.5% Alc./Vol	1.5 375ml Pre-mix Spirits 5% Alc./Vol	1.5 340ml Alcoholic Soda 5.5% Alc./Vol	1 30ml Spirit Nip 40% Alc./Vol	22 700ml Bottle of Spirits 40% Alc./Vol
0.9 60ml Port/Sherry Glass 18% Alc./Vol.	1 100ml Standard Serve of Wine 12% Alc./Vol	1.8 180ml Average Restaurant Serve of Wine 12% Alc./Vol	7 750ml Bottle of Wine 12% Alc./Vol	38 4 Litres Cask Wine 12% Alc./Vol		

* NSW, WA, ACT = Middy; VIC, QLD, TAS = Pot; NT = Handle; SA = Schooner

Labels on alcoholic drink containers state the number of Standard Drinks in the container. In order to make this easier, the alcohol industry is now starting to use a standard drink logo. Check the label to find out how many Standard Drinks are in the bottle or can.



Alcohol can cause health problems

Drinking any amount of alcohol can interfere with judgement, performance and reflexes.

Risky drinking can cause falls, accidents and risk-taking behaviour. This can harm you or other people. Problems caused by regular risky drinking include memory loss, brain damage, nerve damage, mood and personality changes, difficulty sleeping, sexual problems, liver damage, cancer, stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, birth defects and alcohol dependence.

Alcohol interacts with many medicines, including herbal preparations and illicit drugs. The effect of the alcohol or the medicine can be altered, sometimes with as little as one drink. Ask a pharmacist and read medicine labels and pamphlets to check for possible problems.

Benefits from drinking less include:

- Improved mood
- Save money
- More energy
- No hangovers
- Less risk of car accidents, falls and other accidents
- Less risk of high blood pressure
- Less risk of liver damage
- Less risk of brain damage
- Less risk of cancer
- Better and safer sex life
- Happier relationships
- Safer pregnancies.
- Better health
- Better sleep
- Lose weight
- Better memory

Steps to being a low-risk drinker:

- Know when and why you drink alcohol
- Decide what you will do in situations where you would normally drink alcohol
- Decide what you will eat or drink instead
- Decide what your trigger to stop drinking alcohol will be
- Decide what situations you will need to avoid
- Ask family and friends to support you in your efforts to drink less alcohol.

Changing your drinking pattern:

- To minimise intoxication, alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks and eat before and while drinking
- Choose low-alcohol drinks
- Sip, do not gulp or scull your drink
- Do not let others top up your drink
- Avoid 'shouts' and 'rounds'

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

- Avoid the triggers for drinking alcohol (e.g., don't have alcoholic drinks in the house; don't smoke)
- Change your routine (e.g., see a movie rather than going to the pub)
- Reward yourself for low-risk drinking.

Staying a low-risk drinker

- Identify the most difficult times – avoid these situations or plan activities to help you cope with them.
- Consider joining a support group.
- Remind yourself of all the reasons to limit your alcohol.

People with certain medical conditions may be more at risk of problems associated with drinking alcohol, even when drinking within the guidelines. Ask a doctor or pharmacist if your medical condition is likely to be affected by drinking alcohol and if your medicine is likely to interact with alcohol. Never mix alcohol and illicit drugs.

For more information

A doctor – listed under 'Medical Practitioners' in the yellow pages of the phone book.

Alcoholics Anonymous – AA Helpline phone (02)9799 1199 (24hrs) or website www.aa.org.au

Australian Alcohol Guidelines – website www.alcohol.gov.au

Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state:

ACT (02) 6207 9977

NSW (02) 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599

NT (08) 8922 8399 or 1800 131 350

QLD (07) 3837 5989 or 1800 177 833

SA (08) 8363 8618 or 1300 131 340

TAS 1800 811 994 VIC 1800 888 236

WA (08) 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024

Lifeline – phone 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

Kids Help Line – phone 1800 55 1800 or website www.kidshelp.com.au

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

NPS Medicines Line – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

The Poisons Information Centre – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacy Self Care Support – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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