Alcohol. How much is too much?
Drinking alcohol is part and parcel of many people's social life. However, some people start to find it leads to problems in their lives. This may be because they begin to drink too much, or maybe drink too often. Or they drink too much in situations that put them or other people at risk.
We are going to follow the drinking habits and problems of five people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People who drink alcohol</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie is 19 years old and studying Leisure &amp; Tourism at her local college. Rosie has a large group of friends, who enjoy meeting in bars and usually go dancing in a nightclub at weekends.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Anna                   |
| Anna is 34 years old and is a marketing consultant for a local PR company. She is very ambitious and tends to work long hours. Anna lives with her boyfriend. |

| Ian                    |
| Ian is 41 years old and is a maintenance man for a gas company. Ian is married and has three children aged 7, 9 and 11 years. Ian will go out for a few pints a couple of times in the week. About once a month he will spend Saturday with the lads, watching the match in the afternoon and then carrying on drinking until closing time. |

| Mehmet                 |
| Mehmet is a 56 year old businessman. He often entertains clients at boozy lunches. Mehmet will also drink brandy at home, to unwind at the end of the day. |

| Barbara                |
| Barbara is 70 years old and has been retired for 15 years; she lives alone. Barbara likes to have a drink every evening and will drink gin or sherry at home. |
Units of alcohol

So, how can you decide if someone is drinking too much, too often? Firstly, you need to work out how many units they usually drink.

Different drinks contain different strengths of alcohol, so some kinds will have more units of alcohol than others. You can calculate the amount of alcohol in any drink if you know the quantity of liquid and the percentage of alcohol it contains.

We know you are not likely to remember a formula when you are having a drink, so we have given a guide to the number of units contained in some popular drinks, on the facing page.

If you can’t find your favourite drink, here is the calculation formula for you to work it out for yourself:

\[
\text{Units} = \frac{\text{Volume (ml)} \times \% \text{ alcohol (abv)}}{1000}
\]

A guide to the number of units in some popular drinks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drink Description</th>
<th>Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pint or can of normal-strength lager (Harp, Carling, Boddingtons etc)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pint or can of strong lager (Stella, Red Stripe, Corona, Kronenbourg etc)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottle of lager (Budweiser etc)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-litre bottle of normal-strength cider (Strongbow, Woodpecker etc)</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-litre bottle of strong cider (White Lightning etc)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 bottle of alcopop (Bacardi Breezer, WKD, Smirnoff Ice etc)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75cl bottle of sherry (QC, Harveys Bristol Cream)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75cl bottle of port</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75cl bottle of wine (Wines come in different strengths, so check the label)</td>
<td>7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large glass of wine in a pub</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard-size bottle of spirits (Vodka, gin, brandy, whisky etc)</td>
<td>26-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-litre bottle of spirits (Vodka, gin, brandy, whisky etc)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A single pub measure of spirits (Vodka, gin, brandy, whisky etc)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How much do these people drink every week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Drink Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rosie</td>
<td>Will usually have 3 bottles of alcopops when she goes out twice in the week. At weekends she will drink half a bottle of wine and up to 8 alcopops in a night. Rosie drinks in the week and once at the weekend. This adds up to 32 units a week. This is over twice the recommended limit for a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Will drink a bottle of wine at least 3 nights in the week. Anna sometimes drinks so much that she can’t remember what she did the previous night. Anna can drink up to 27 units a week; this is almost double the recommended limit for a woman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ian</td>
<td>Will drink at least 3 to 4 pints of lager each of nights he goes to the pub. If Ian is having a Saturday ‘session’ he can drink up to 15 pints of lager. Ian usually drinks no more than 21 units a week. But once a month he can drink up to 46 units a week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mehmet</td>
<td>Will drink at least 3 bottles of red wine in a week while having meals, plus a bottle of brandy at home. Mehmet drinks 51 units a week, well over twice the recommended limit for a man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>Will drink at least a litre of gin a week. Barbara can drink up to 40 units a week; this is more than three times the recommended limit for a woman.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does your drinking affect your day-to-day life?

It’s not just about units - it’s also about how alcohol affects your day-to-day life. Read on to find out how other people are affected by alcohol and discover more about your own drinking by taking our 5 minute quiz on page 14.

What are the safe levels?

Men
The NHS recommends that men should not regularly drink more than three to four units of alcohol per day. This means no more than 21 units a week.

Women
The NHS recommends that women should not regularly drink more than two to three units of alcohol per day. This means no more than 14 units a week.

When not to drink
Men and women are advised to have two alcohol free days a week.

Pregnant women or women trying to conceive should avoid drinking alcohol. If they do choose to drink, to protect the baby, they should not drink more than one or two units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk.

Drinking alcohol can put you at risk. For example, always avoid drinking alcohol before driving, exercising or using machinery.
## How drinking affects their lives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Story</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rosie</strong></td>
<td>Rosie usually feels rubbish on a Monday morning after going out over the weekend and often misses college, meaning she has fallen behind. Also Rosie has had a few regrettable one-night stands in the last few months.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anna</strong></td>
<td>Anna recently went for drinks on a Friday straight from work. She started off drinking with people from work but during the evening they left. Anna was too drunk to care and was talking to strangers. Anna can’t remember the last two hours she was out. The police picked up Anna off the street where she was sitting and crying.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ian</strong></td>
<td>Ian was looking forward to his monthly Saturday session. However, Ian has found that he can’t handle it like he used to, and by the end of the night he was feeling tired, confused and irritable. Whilst waiting for a taxi, Ian got into an argument with a police officer. One thing lead to another and, eventually, Ian was arrested and spent the night in the cells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mehmet</strong></td>
<td>Mehmet is suffering from stress, though he feels having a drink helps him to relax. Even so, when he wakes up in the morning he is less able to face his worries. He has high blood pressure, meaning he often feels dizzy. He argues with his wife when she says how worried she is.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barbara</strong></td>
<td>Barbara has suffered from a range of health problems recently. Her doctor says that if she reduced her drinking she would feel better. Barbara finds she sometimes feels lonely when she has had a drink. But if she calls family or friends when drunk, this can cause arguments and upset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Alcohol can affect your well being, health and relationships. It can also place you in vulnerable or regrettable situations.
# Alcohol quiz

Please answer the questions by ticking the relevant box and then add up your score.

## Scoring System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Your Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you have a drink that contains alcohol?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 - 4 times per month</td>
<td>2 - 3 times per week</td>
<td>4+ times per week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many standard alcoholic drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?</td>
<td>1 - 2 Units</td>
<td>3 - 4 Units</td>
<td>5 - 6 Units</td>
<td>7 - 8 Units</td>
<td>10+ Units</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often in the last year have you found you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily or almost daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often in the last year have you failed to do what was expected of you because of drinking?</td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily or almost daily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has a relative/friend/doctor/health worker been concerned about your drinking or advised you to cut down?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, but not in the last year</td>
<td>Yes, during the last year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Results

0 - 4: Your score indicates that you are drinking at sensible levels.

5 and above: Your score indicates that your drinking may be causing you problems. It may be time to consider changing your drinking habits or cutting down.

The higher your score, the more likely your drinking is causing you and those around you problems. Have you considered seeking advice and help about your drinking?

Our website [www.wirralalcohol.co.uk](http://www.wirralalcohol.co.uk) provides advice and information, which can help you. The site also contains information on local agencies that are able to give you help and support. You can also call our free confidential advice line on: 0800 988 1421.

Alternatively, make an appointment with your GP or visit your local pharmacist.
Cut down or stop?
Many people who drink too much just need to cut down. Others will need to stop completely. Think about how your drinking is affecting you and the people around you.

Will cutting down be difficult?
Drinking may have become a habit. Often, if you change your routine and do different things, you will find you don’t crave alcohol as much as you thought. When you are cutting down or stopping drinking, support from family or friends can be a great help. However, if you are used to drinking regularly, you may have a strong desire to drink alcohol. You can call 0800 988 1421 for free confidential advice. Advisors can help you change your drinking behaviour.

What are the benefits of cutting down on drinking?
If you drink above the recommended limits, you may already be experiencing problems such as:
- Tiredness
- Gaining weight
- Coping with hangovers
- Arguing with your partner or family
- Not being able to remember what you did the night before.
Overall, you won’t be in the best physical shape. If you continue drinking at harmful levels, you could develop more severe illnesses, such as high blood pressure, brain damage and liver disease.

But it isn’t just your physical health that is affected.
Alcohol affects judgement and the ability to control impulses; this can lead people to do things that they wouldn’t do if they were sober. People can embarrass themselves or others after drinking too much, can have regretted or unwanted sexual encounters or get into arguments and fights.
Try these seven tips to change your drinking habits.

They can help you cut down or work towards stopping drinking alcohol altogether.

After reading this far, you should know quite a lot about the effects of alcohol and the problems it can cause to your health and personal life.

Seven Tips

Try these seven tips to change your drinking habits.

Deciding on good reasons for changing your drinking habits will help you to succeed. What we mean by a “good reason” is one that makes sense to you. Right now, think of some good reasons for changing your habits.

There are dozens of good reasons to change your drinking habits; but they are different for each person.

For example,
- You’ll have more time for things you’ve always wanted to do
- You’ll save money and be able to spend it on other things
- You’ll have more energy
- You’ll lose weight
- You’ll be less likely to have arguments with those around you
- You’ll be less likely to develop serious health problems such as liver disease.
No matter how much you want to change your drinking habits, there will be times when you’ll find it difficult. Stop and think for a moment about the last few times you drank too much. Where were you and what were you feeling?

We have listed some of the more common high-risk times. You can use this list to think about your own high-risk times.

**High-risk times**
- After work
- Out celebrating at a party or a club
- After a really difficult day, at work or looking after the children
- When I want to relax
- When I feel lonely or depressed.

You have now thought about your own high-risk times and identified when you are mostly likely to drink or drink too much. In the next section, we help you think of ways of coping with these difficult high-risk times.

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**TIP TWO**

**Set your goals**

Having a plan to change your drinking means you need to set goals you can work towards. You should pick a day when you are going to start your plan and set your daily drinking goals each week.

The next thing to do is to keep track of your drinking – this will help you work out whether you are meeting your goals and keeping on track.

The main thing to remember, if you don’t meet your goals, is to keep on trying. Work out strategies to help you meet them in the future.

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**TIP THREE**

**Recognise difficult times**

No matter how much you want to change your drinking habits, there will be times when you’ll find it difficult.

Stop and think for a moment about the last few times you drank too much. Where were you and what were you feeling?

We have listed some of the more common high-risk times. You can use this list to think about your own high-risk times.
This plan is all about changing your habits. Some people find it easier to change a habit if they have someone to help them. This person could be your partner/friend, or someone at work who also wants to change their habits.

Your support person should be someone you can talk to easily, can be honest with, and can ask for advice when you need it. If you are very worried about the effects of drinking on your health, your doctor or nurse can help you. There are also special alcohol counsellors for this reason, and a telephone number to contact them is listed on the last page of this booklet.

TIP FIVE
Find someone to support you

Ways of coping with difficult times:

- Avoid going to the pub after work – perhaps arrange a different social activity e.g. jogging, college course, joining a gym
- Avoid friends who drink heavily
- Plan activities or tasks at those times when you usually drink
- When you’re bored or stressed, have a physical workout or go for a walk instead of drinking
- Eat a meal before drinking: it will make you feel fuller and then you’ll drink less
- Remind yourself that the craving for the drink will go if you occupy yourself with something else
- Avoid drinking in “shouts” or “rounds”
- Alternate your alcoholic drinks with soft drinks
- Practise refusing alcoholic drinks.

TIP FOUR
Deal with difficult times

Ways of coping with difficult times:

- Avoid going to the pub after work – perhaps arrange a different social activity e.g. jogging, college course, joining a gym
- Avoid friends who drink heavily
- Plan activities or tasks at those times when you usually drink
- When you’re bored or stressed, have a physical workout or go for a walk instead of drinking
- Eat a meal before drinking: it will make you feel fuller and then you’ll drink less
- Remind yourself that the craving for the drink will go if you occupy yourself with something else
- Avoid drinking in “shouts” or “rounds”
- Alternate your alcoholic drinks with soft drinks
- Practise refusing alcoholic drinks.
TIP SIX
Stick to your goals

Drinking alcohol is an enjoyable part of many people’s lives – a habit that they’d feel lost without.
This type of habit is hard to break. However, it may help if you write down your goals.
REMEMBER: Every time you stop yourself from doing something by habit, you are one step nearer to breaking the habit altogether.

TIP SEVEN
If you need extra help

If you have been a regular heavy drinker, or if you are finding it difficult to cut down your drinking, there is help available for you in Wirral.

- Counselling, advice and support for people affected by alcohol
- Support and counselling for families, friends and colleagues of people who have alcohol-related problems
- Home detoxification programmes or in-patient detox
- Support for those who are recovering from alcohol problems.

To find out more about local help please call:
0800 988 1421
Or visit:
www.wirralalcohol.co.uk
How changing drinking habits made a difference

Rosie planned ahead to drink less. Rosie realised she had lots of good reasons for drinking less at weekends. She really regretted some of the things she had done while drunk and now wanted to focus on doing well at college. Rosie planned ahead, which meant she drank less. She drank a lot less whilst getting ready to go out, she danced more so she missed out on rounds and avoided pre-mixed spirit drinks.

Anna found it easier than she thought to control her drinking. Anna was ashamed and shocked after being picked up by the police and now avoids going for a drink after work on a Friday! Anna also realised that her drinking at home was more out of habit than enjoyment and after not drinking for a week, she found she slept better and had more energy. By keeping a drinks diary she found it helped her drink within safe limits.

Ian’s wake up call led him to change his drinking behaviour. Waking up in a police cell was humiliating. He realised that alcohol was not only affecting his relationship with his family but costing him a lot of money. He also realised that his ‘Saturday sessions’ had to be brought under control. Ian found that the advice on the wirralalcohol.com website helped him to cut down his drinking and that his mates were more supportive than he thought they would be.

Mehmet got support from his local alcohol service and talked about his worries. The support and advice he received helped him to reduce his drinking and that improved his health. Mehmet began to see that the bad atmosphere at home was mainly down to him; since he started drinking less, his relationship with his family has improved.

Barbara realised that alcohol made her feel worse. She also kept herself busy during the day. Barbara sometimes felt lonely and depressed in the evenings. After a period of not drinking, she realised that drinking made her feel worse. Barbara started to plan things to keep her busy so she was tired at the end of the day. She now works in the local charity shop and has made new friends who she goes out with and enjoys one or two drinks now and again.
For free confidential advice about alcohol call:

0800 988 1421

Or visit:

www.wirralalcohol.co.uk