

Alcohol: are you drinking too much?

According to a General Household Survey, 39 per cent of men and 22 per cent of women regularly drink more than the number of units recommended for safe drinking. Are you one of them?

It's easy to underestimate the amount of alcohol you're drinking, especially at home where quantities can err on the generous side. Do you know how many units are lurking in your nightly glass of wine? How about the number of units a day you can safely drink? Read on to discover the essential facts and figures you need.

How much should I be drinking?

Sensible drinking limits are 21 units a week for men and 14 units a week for women. In addition, in 1995 the government introduced daily benchmarks: men should drink no more than three to four units of alcohol per day and women should drink no more than two to three units.

Women have a different metabolism to men and their bodies contain less water - which means blood alcohol content (BAC) will be higher after drinking the same amount.

What's a unit?

A unit is 8g of pure alcohol (ethanol). Forget the 'one drink equals one unit' myth. This equates to half a pint of 3.5% beer, half a standard glass of 12% wine, and a single 25ml measure of spirits.

Is there an easy way to work out how many units I'm drinking?

Yes! Go get a calculator: the number of units a drink contains is determined by two things - the strength and size of the drink. Alcohol strength is measured as a percentage of volume or AbV (alcohol by volume) which, by law, must be displayed on the drink label.

When it comes to drink size, glasses are usually small (125ml), standard (175ml) or large (250ml). One pint is 568ml. Check your glasses at home by emptying their contents into a measuring jug. Once you know the strength and size of your drink you need a simple calculation to work out your units (see Unit Calculator). Try it when you get home tonight - you'll be shocked at how many units you're drinking.

Unit calculator

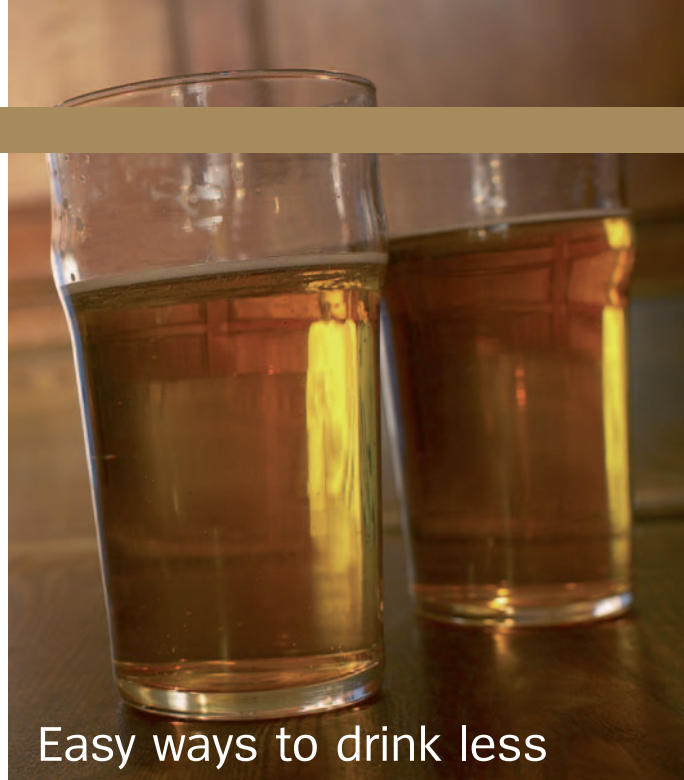
How many units are there in a glass?

Multiply the volume of drink in ml by the AbV and divide the result by 1,000.
For example: one 175ml glass of 12% wine = 2.1 units
(175 multiplied by 12, divided by 1,000).

How many ml equal one unit?

Divide 1 by the AbV and multiply by 1,000.
For example: one unit of 12% wine equals 83ml
(1 divided by 12, multiplied by 1,000)

If you're confused go to www.drinkaware.co.uk and use the online unit calculator.



Easy ways to drink less

- Have at least two AFDs (alcohol-free days) a week. AFDs are really important; they give your over-worked liver a mini holiday
- Avoid over-pouring at home by marking your glass (use sellotape or a small sticker if you don't want to make a permanent mark)
- Use tall, narrow glasses: according to a study by Cornell University, people are more likely to pour extra alcohol into short, wide glasses than tall, narrow glasses (tall glasses look like they hold more)
- Avoid top ups - wait until your glass is empty before refilling so you know exactly how much you are drinking
- Reduce your unit intake by switching to a weaker drink
- Alternate your drinks with an alcohol-free alternative (water, juice or soft drinks)
- When you go out take less 'drinking' money with you and leave the credit cards at home
- Avoid buying rounds; they encourage you to drink more than you normally would.

Further information

www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Alcohol Concern runs an excellent six-week online programme to help people develop safer drinking habits. Register for free at www.downyourdrink.org.uk