

HOW MANY UNITS IN A DRINK?

1 =



A small bottle (275ml) of lower strength (4%) alcopop



A half pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider



A single measure of spirit (40%)

CHECK THE LABEL

Most drinks tell you how many units are in them

Know your limits

Units of alcohol per 125ml glass



2 =



A standard glass (175ml) of lower strength (12%) wine or champagne



A pint of lower strength (4%) lager, beer or cider



A 440ml can of medium strength (4.5%) lager, beer or cider



A double measure of spirit (40%)

3 =



A pint of medium strength (5%) lager, beer or cider



A large glass (250ml) of lower strength (12%) wine



A large bottle (700ml) of lower strength (4%) alcopop

The UK Chief Medical Officers recommend that adults do not regularly exceed:



14 units a week for both men and women.

4 =



A large bottle (700ml) of higher strength (5.5%) alcopop



A 500ml can of higher strength (7.5%) lager, beer or cider



Drinks should be spread over a number of days. There are no safe limits for under 18 years of age.

1 to 2 units

After drinking 1 to 2 units of alcohol, the heart rate speeds up and blood vessels expand, giving people the warm, sociable and talkative feeling associated with moderate drinking.

4 to 6 units

After drinking 4 to 6 units of alcohol, the brain and nervous system starts to be affected. Alcohol begins to affect the part of the brain associated with judgement and decision making, which makes people less inhibited.

The alcohol begins to interrupt brain signalling, making people feel light-headed and slowing down reaction times and co-ordination.

8 to 9 units

After drinking 8 to 9 units of alcohol, reaction times will be much slower, speech will begin to slur and vision can begin to lose focus. It will depend on how fast someone is drinking and whether they have eaten or paced their drinking with water or soft drinks.

The liver, which filters alcohol out of the body, will be unable to remove all of the alcohol overnight (9 hours to break down 9 units), so it's likely that if drinking this much, a person will wake with a hangover.

10 to 12 units

After drinking 10 to 12 units of alcohol, co-ordination will be highly impaired, placing the person at serious risk of having an accident. The high level of alcohol has a depressant effect (slowing things down) on both the mind and body, which makes people feel drowsy.

The body attempts to quickly pass out the alcohol in urine. This will leave the person feeling badly dehydrated in the morning, which may cause a severe headache.

The excess amount of alcohol in the system can also upset digestion, leading to nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and indigestion.

More than 12 units

If someone drinks more than 12 units of alcohol, they're at considerable risk of developing alcohol poisoning, particularly if drinking many units over a short period of time.

It usually takes the liver about an hour to remove one unit of alcohol from the body.

Alcohol poisoning occurs when excessive amounts of alcohol start to interfere with the body's automatic functions, such as:

- breathing
- heart rate
- gag reflex, which prevents you choking

Alcohol poisoning can cause a person to fall into a coma and could lead to their death.

Other risks

Some of the other risks associated with alcohol misuse include:

- accidents and injury – More than 1 in 10 visits to accident and emergency (A&E) departments are because of alcohol-related illnesses
- violence and antisocial behaviour – Each year in England about half a million violent incidents are linked to alcohol misuse.
- unsafe sex – This can lead to unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- loss of personal possessions – Many people lose personal possessions, such as their wallet or mobile phone, when they're drunk.
- unplanned time off work or college – This could put your job or education at risk.