

Cutting Back on Your Drinking

Do you enjoy a drink while out with friends or at the end of a long day? Are there times when you wonder if you may be drinking too much? This handout will help you find out if you're drinking at a risky level and give you some tips for cutting down.

What's the harm?

You may have heard that regular light to moderate drinking (½ -1 drink a day for women and men over the age of 65, and 2 drinks a day for men under 65) may have health benefit. Actually, as we have learned more from recent research, it turns out that daily drinking once considered low risk may increase health problems in individuals at risk (e.g., various forms of cancer, negative impact on cognitive function as we age). Alcohol may also have negative interactions with many medications. With at risk drinking or heavy drinking (any more than described in the diagrams on the next page) the risks definitely outweigh the benefits.

Tips to Cut Back on Your Drinking

- **Keep track** of how much you drink. Making a note of each drink before you drink it may help to slow you down.
- **Count and measure** drink sizes and always measure at home. Be careful, when you are away from home, drinks may be stronger than you think!
- **Set goals** to decide how many days a week you want to drink and how many drinks you will have on those days. It's a good idea to have some days you don't drink at all.

- **Sip slowly** and no more than one standard drink with alcohol per hour. Make every other drink a nonalcoholic one, like water or juice.
- **Include food.** You should not drink on an empty stomach. Food helps the alcohol be absorbed into your system more slowly.
- **Fill free time** by finding something new to do that does not involve alcohol.
- **Certain people or places** trigger you to drink even when you don't want to. Try to avoid them. If drinking at home is a problem, keep your home alcohol free.
- **Remind yourself** of the reasons you are making a change. Talk to someone who knows about urges. Distract yourself with exercise or hobbies.
- **Just say "NO"** when offered a drink at times when you don't want one. Have a polite "no thanks" ready.

Resources

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: www.samhsa.gov

Alcohol screening: How much is too much? www.alcoholscreening.org

Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse: Signs, Symptoms and Help: www.helpguide.org

12 fl oz of regular beer = **8-9 fl oz of malt liquor** (shown in a 12 oz glass) = **5 fl oz of table wine** = **1.5 fl oz shot of 80-proof spirits** ("hard liquor" - whiskey, gin, rum, vodka, tequila, etc.)

about 5% alcohol about 7% alcohol about 12% alcohol about 40% alcohol

The percent of "pure" alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies by beverage.

What's a standard drink?

Low-risk drinking limits		MEN	WOMEN
	On any single DAY	No more than 4 drinks on any day	No more than 3 drinks on any day
	Per WEEK	No more than 14 drinks per week	No more than 7 drinks per week
		** AND **	** AND **

To stay low-risk, keep within BOTH the single-day AND weekly limits.

What is "low risk" drinking?

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 12/2023. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7628