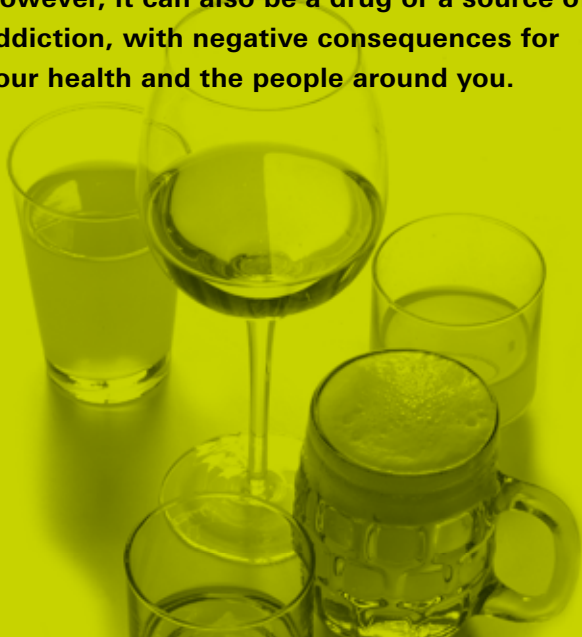


What should I know about alcohol?

Alcohol can be a source of enjoyment. However, it can also be a drug or a source of addiction, with negative consequences for your health and the people around you.



This leaflet provides answers to the following questions:

- When is alcohol consumption a minor risk?
- What are the risks associated with too much alcohol?
- Am I drinking too much?
- Advice on how to control your alcohol consumption
- Do I have a drinking problem?
- Where can I get help?

Alcohol – no problem!

When is alcohol consumption a minor risk?

- Healthy adult men are recommended not to drink more than 2 standard units of alcohol per day.
- Healthy adult women are recommended not to drink more than 1 standard unit of alcohol per day.



1 standard unit
= approx. 3 dl beer
= 1 dl wine
= 2 cl spirit (hard liquor)

When should I be cautious about drinking alcohol?

- When you are ill or taking medication. Ask your doctor whether you should avoid alcohol.
- From the age of 60 you should be more careful, as alcohol starts to have a greater effect.

When should you avoid drinking alcohol?

- Alcoholic drinks should not be given to children. Children and teenagers under the age of 16 should not drink any alcohol. They are particularly sensitive to the effects of alcohol.
- Pregnant women are recommended to refrain from drinking alcohol altogether. Alcohol can cause serious damage to the embryo and the foetus.
- You should avoid drinking alcohol altogether when driving, at work or when practising sport. Even a little alcohol in the blood increases the risk of accidents and reduces physical and mental performance.

Enjoying alcohol – what does that mean?

Alcohol should be something special. It is not a drink like any other.

It is better to be aware of how you drink. You should not simply drink alcohol out of habit or without a thought.

Too much alcohol is harmful

What are the risks associated with too much alcohol?

Immediate risks of alcohol (examples)

- Even a little alcohol can impair your reactions. This can increase the risk of accidents, for example when driving.
- When you are under the influence of alcohol, you are more willing to take risks and you lose control over your own behaviour.
- Heavy intoxication can make you lose consciousness. It is also possible to die from alcohol poisoning.

Risks of regularly drinking too much (examples)

- Alcohol can damage almost all bodily organs (liver, pancreas, stomach, etc.).
- High blood pressure, risk of heart attack
- Brain damage: concentration difficulties or even dementia
- Mental health problems, such as depression
- Social problems, for example at work or among family and friends.
- And the more you drink, the greater the risk of becoming addicted.

Beware of alcohol in the following situations:

- You should not drink before driving or practising sport.
- Youngsters under the age of 16 and pregnant women should avoid alcohol altogether.
- If you are ill or taking medication, you should ask your doctor whether you can drink alcohol.

Does alcohol protect the heart?

Alcohol may reduce the risk of certain heart diseases. However, that is only the case when alcohol is drunk in moderation.

If you refrain from smoking or practise some form of sport, you will be doing more to protect your heart than by drinking alcohol!



Alcohol – a problem...

Am I drinking too much?

Higher levels of alcohol consumption

If you drink more than the quantities shown you are likely to damage your health.

Reasons for drinking

for example:

- Drinking out of habit: **«I need two or three glasses in the evening. Otherwise I can't relax after work.»** N.B. A habit can become so regular that it turns into an addiction.
- Drinking to cope with problems: **«I have problems and stress at work. Alcohol helps me to forget my worries.»** N.B. If you drink alcohol to relieve stress or forget your problems, there's a risk you will drink more and more.

Some people have a greater risk of alcohol problems than others.

Examples of circumstances that can aggravate the problem:

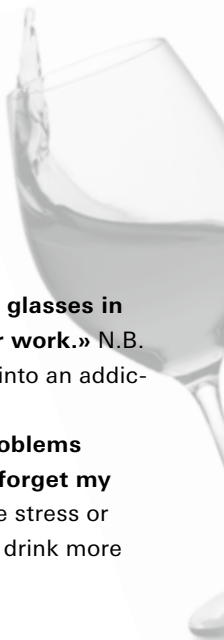
- Stress, for example at work or at home
- Stressful events in the past (traumatic experiences)
- Alcohol addiction in close relatives

What is alcohol?

All alcoholic drinks, such as wine, beer, or spirits, contain ethanol (pure alcohol).

Ethanol in alcoholic drinks is what makes you tipsy or drunk. It is also what causes an addiction.

Ethanol is toxic for the body.



Do I have a drinking problem?

- Have you ever had the impression you should reduce your drinking?
- Have you ever become angry when other people criticize your drinking?
- Have you ever felt remorse because of your drinking?
- On waking up in the morning, have you ever started the day with a drink of alcohol to calm your nerves or relieve your hangover?

If you answer Yes to any of these questions, this is a sign that you may have a drinking problem. If you answer Yes to two or more of these questions, it is likely you have a drinking problem.

In this case it is worthwhile talking to a specialist. That will help you find out whether your drinking is a problem.

Alcohol addiction

Only a specialist can diagnose an alcohol addiction.

Examples of signs of addiction:

- You can no longer go without alcohol.
- You can no longer control your drinking.
- You drink more and more.

An alcohol addiction is no reason to feel ashamed. An alcohol addiction is an illness that can be treated.

It is estimated that 250,000 people in Switzerland are addicted to alcohol.

Where can I get help?

It is a sign of strength if you ask for help!

The aim is to regain control over your own behaviour and take the burden off others.

Who can you turn to for help?

- **Doctors** (family doctor or specialist in psychiatry or psychotherapy): There are also doctors who speak your mother tongue (see www.doctorfmh.ch).
- **Counselling centre for alcohol problems:** The specialists in these centres are obliged to maintain professional secrecy. By contacting the counselling centre in your region, you or someone you trust can find out whether there are opportunities for counselling in your mother tongue. You can find the addresses of counselling centres in your region or in-patient services, for example, at www.suchtindex.ch. You may obtain information about centres in your region from Sucht Schweiz / Addiction Suisse, Tel. 021 321 29 76.
- **Self-help groups**, for example Alcoholics Anonymous (D: Tel. 0848 848 885, www.anonyme-alkoholiker.ch / F, I, E: Tel. 0848 848 846, www.aasri.org)
- **Psychotherapists** may also provide support. Addresses of psychotherapists (according to canton



and languages spoken) may be found for example at www.psychologie.ch (Föderation Schweizer Psychologinnen und Psychologen FSP / Fédération Suisse des Psychologues FSP) or at www.psychotherapie.ch (Assoziation Schweizer Psychotherapeutinnen und Psychotherapeuten ASP / Association Suisse des Psychothérapeutes ASP).

- **Someone you trust:** It may also be useful, for example, to talk to someone in your circle of friends or in your religious or cultural community.

An alcohol addiction is not a personal failure and has nothing to do with being weak-willed. An alcohol addiction is an illness.

Help is available!



Advice on how to control your alcohol consumption

The following tips may help you to take control of a drinking problem:

- Quench your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks.
- Drink slowly!
- Make it a rule to have at least one non-alcoholic drink after every alcoholic drink.
- Decide for yourself how quickly you drink. You do not need to drink at the same pace as other people.
- Don't allow anyone to top your glass up until it is completely empty. That way you will be able to keep track of how much you drink.
- Avoid drinking any alcohol if you are in a bad mood. Alcohol doesn't solve any problems!



Even changing everyday habits can be important:

- Avoid any situations that trigger your desire to drink.
- Cultivate your hobbies and interests.
- Make sure you have a balanced lifestyle. Make a conscious effort to deal with everyday stress (through sport, relaxation, etc.).

If you do not achieve your goal:

Do not hesitate to seek help (see «Where can I get help?»)! It may help you to talk about your worries with someone you trust. They can comfort you and help you take the first steps.



Further information

www.migesplus.ch – health care information in various languages (website in English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, Albanian, Serbian/Bosnian/Croatian, information also in other languages).

Schweizerisches Rotes Kreuz
Werkstrasse 18, 3084 Wabern
info@migesplus.ch, Tel. 031 960 75 71

**www.suchtschweiz.ch / www.addictionsuisse.ch /
www.dipendenzevizzera.ch** – Information about addictions
(German, French and Italian)

Leaflet «Someone close to you has an addiction: What can you do?» (English, German, French, Italian, Albanian, Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish)

This leaflet and the leaflet «Someone close to you has an addiction: What can you do?» can be downloaded as PDF files from www.migesplus.ch or www.suchtschweiz.ch / www.addictionsuisse.ch or ordered by sending a stamped addressed envelope to Sucht Schweiz / Addiction Suisse, Postfach 870, 1001 Lausanne.

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