

# Alcohol: Defining Risk Levels

## **Low Risk Drinking:**

**Recommended sensible alcohol intake: 14 Units per week**



- Men and women are advised not to regularly drink more than 14 units a week.
- Spread your drinking over three days or more if you drink as much as 14 units a week.

If you want to cut down how much you're drinking, a good way to help achieve this is to have several drink-free days each week.

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts/what-is-alcohol/new-government-alcohol-unit-guidelines>

## **YOUNG PEOPLE / UNDER 18:**

There is no recommended safe level for children or teenagers to drink, as their bodies and organs are still developing.  
(CMO: No alcohol at all up to age 15.)

## **Increasing Risk Drinking:**

Defined as when a person drinks over the recommended alcohol levels

- May not yet have any health problems related to alcohol, but increasing risk of experiencing problems in the future.

Increasing Risk Drinking, particularly binge drinking, also carries additional risks such as:

- being involved in an accident
- becoming involved in an argument or fight
- taking part in risky or illegal behaviour when drunk, such as drink-driving

## **Higher Risk Drinking:**

Defined as when a person drinks double the recommended alcohol levels, and experiences health problems that are directly related to alcohol. In some cases, there may be obvious problems such as:

- depression
- an alcohol-related accident, such as a head injury
- acute pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas)

Many of the health problems that occur as a result of harmful drinking do not cause any symptoms until they reach their most serious stages.

These include:

- high blood pressure (hypertension)
- cirrhosis (scarring of the liver)
- some types of cancer, such as mouth cancer and bowel cancer
- heart disease

This means it can be easy to underestimate the levels of physical damage caused by higher risk drinking. Harmful drinking can also cause related social problems, such as difficulties with your partner or spouse, family and friends or at work or college.

### **Dependent drinking:**

- Alcohol is both physically and psychologically addictive.
- Being dependent on alcohol means that a person feels that they are unable to function without alcohol, and the consumption of alcohol becomes an important, or sometimes the most important, factor in their life.
- Depending on their level of dependence, a person can experience withdrawal symptoms if they suddenly stop drinking alcohol.

Withdrawal symptoms can be both physical and psychological.

Physical withdrawal symptoms include:

- hand tremors ("the shakes");
- sweating;
- nausea;
- visual hallucinations (seeing things that are not actually real);
- seizures (fits) in the most serious cases;

Psychological withdrawal symptoms include:

- depression;
- anxiety;
- irritability;
- restlessness;
- insomnia

### **Severely Dependent Drinkers:**

- Severely dependent drinkers usually experience severe withdrawal symptoms. They often fall into a pattern of "relief drinking", where they drink to avoid withdrawal symptoms.
- Severely dependent drinkers are often able to tolerate very high levels of alcohol, and they are able to drink amounts that would incapacitate, or even kill, most other people.