

# alcohol and *health*

Just as our eating and activity habits have changed over the years, our drinking habits have also changed. With more options available in both bars and shops, having a drink after work or on a day off can easily become the norm. And after working hard, it can be nice to unwind by drinking with friends or enjoying a glass of wine with dinner. This factsheet gives you all you need to get clued up on alcohol while still enjoying a drink or two.

## current alcohol recommendations

The UK Chief Medical Officers' advice is to drink no more than 14 units a week, spread over three or more days, to keep the health risks from alcohol to a low level. Alcohol-free days are recommended, and the recommendations are the same for men and women. During pregnancy and breastfeeding the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) advise to avoid alcohol completely.

## what does 14 units actually look like?

14 units is equivalent to around 6 pints of beer (4% vol), 6 medium (175ml) glasses of wine (13% vol), or 14 25ml glasses of spirits (40% vol).



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# calories in alcohol

Calorie labels on alcohol aren't mandatory, so it's not a surprise most of us underestimate how many calories are in drinks. Here are the averages for common drinks and measures.

Type of drink	Typical units	Typical calorie value
Wine (standard 175ml glass at 13% vol)	2.3 units	159 calories
Wine (standard 250ml glass at 13% vol)	3.3 units	225 calories
Low strength beer/lager (pint at 4% vol)	2.3 units	182 calories
Higher strength beer/lager (pint at 5% vol)	2.8 units	244 calories
Regular strength cider (pint at 4.5% vol)	2.6 units	250 calories
Single measure of spirit (25ml at 40% vol)	1 unit	61 calories
Bottle of alcopop (275ml at 4% vol)	1.1 unit	193 calories

The 13.5 units shown on the previous page would contribute an extra 963 calories to our week. And that bottle of white wine? Around 700 calories (which can be more than a meal!).

## tipping us towards weight gain

Slimming World's research has found that when drinking alcohol, most of us have a tipping point after which we go on to eat and drink much more than we intended – leading to us consuming 6,300 extra calories in food and alcohol over the next two days. In addition to the calories in alcohol – which stack up quickly – and the fact that it has no filling power, the choices we make after our tipping point often aren't the healthy ones we might otherwise go for.

The average tipping point occurs at around 9 units of alcohol. It sounds quite high, however it's equivalent to 3.7 pints of beer or 3.1 large glasses of wine – easy to reach! As well as the additional 6,300 calories, the research also showed that the following day half of people also cancel physical activity in favour of watching TV, staying in bed or spending time on social media.



# triple measure of success: tips for managing danger zones

Here are some tips on how to cut down on alcohol without cutting down on the fun...

## DANGER ZONE 1

### *Drinking more than we intended*

- Spread out any alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water in between each one.
- Have longer drinks, adding more mixer to a glass of spirits or opting for white wine spritzers.
- Slimming World members tell us a useful strategy can be to decide on how many drinks you'd like to have before you start drinking, and what you'll have in between or after this point – letting someone know can also help you stick to this. And who knows, they might even join you!

## DANGER ZONE 2

### *Eating more, and less healthily, than we intended*

- Tuck into a filling, healthy meal before going out to help line your stomach and keep you feeling fuller over the evening.
- If you're eating out, opt for healthier options, such as lean, protein-packed steak with jacket potato and mushrooms; a tomato-based pasta sauce with lots of veggies; or tandoori chicken with boiled rice and a crisp salad.
- If your post-drink hangout is typically the chippy, you're not the only one! Planning ahead is key here – have a tasty, homemade dish ready and waiting for when you come home, such as a bowl of chilli or curry which can be reheated when you get through the door (and help you avoid the lure of the kebab shop).

## DANGER ZONE 3

### *Healing the hangover with high fat, high sugar foods*

- Keep the fridge and cupboard stocked with 'morning after' favourites so you can easily whip something up when you're out of bed – such as bacon (visible fat removed) and egg fried in low-calorie cooking spray tucked into a wholemeal roll; beans or cheese on toast; or leftover homemade cheese and tomato pasta bake.
- Alcohol is dehydrating so topping your fluid levels back up is essential. Water is the best option, but all fluids will help (except more alcohol!). A glass of milk is also a good option as in addition to helping you hydrate, it contains a balance of protein, fat and carbs as well as important vitamins and minerals.
- Let's be honest, the gym is usually the last place we want to be the morning after. Our members tell us that when they do feel like getting moving, you can't beat a walk around the block, with the added benefit of some fresh air to clear your head.



## can alcohol affect blood sugar?

Yes, drinking alcohol leads to an increase in insulin production, which causes blood sugar levels to drop. The liver is also busy processing the alcohol, and its ability to release glucose to help keep blood sugars in balance is inhibited. This can lead to low blood sugar levels, or hypoglycaemia, particularly in those who have been diagnosed with diabetes.

If you've been diagnosed with diabetes, it's especially important to avoid drinking on an empty stomach and not to drink too much in one go.

# how long does alcohol take to leave the body?

That depends on a number of factors, the main one being time. On average, it takes an adult one hour to process one unit of alcohol, though this differs between individuals. The strength of your drink and the size will affect how many units it has.

As an example, one medium (175ml) glass of wine (13% vol) contains 2.3 units, so will take an average adult over two hours to process through the body. And a standard 750ml bottle of white wine (13% vol) contains 9.8 units, which will take the average person 10 hours until this is out of their bloodstream!

As well as the type and strength of alcohol you've been drinking, break down is also affected by gender, age, weight, how much food you've eaten, and whether you're taking any medication. It's also affected by your metabolism (the speed your body turns food into energy) and how healthy your liver is.

So while some caffeine and a cool shower might help you feel a little better, it won't change how much alcohol is in your body. Similarly, while having a healthy breakfast is great for helping to replenish vitamins, minerals and fluid, it won't impact on how quickly the alcohol is removed from your bloodstream.

If you know you need to drive or work the next day, consider choosing lower strength drinks, single spirit measures instead of doubles, and half pints instead of pints. Also aim to alternate alcoholic drinks with water or soft drinks to help reduce your overall alcohol intake and to help keep you hydrated.

*The Royal College of Midwives has provided the following recommendations:  
'If you are going to be on a night shift it is not advisable to consume alcohol that day. You need to be aware that if for example you go out for lunch and enjoy a glass of wine or two a few hours before starting a night shift, this may not give you enough time for the alcohol to leave your system.'*

Now you're armed with the facts and tips for managing those danger zones, you can raise a glass to enjoying a drink while taking care of your health.

**For more information on alcohol, please visit [drinkaware.co.uk](http://drinkaware.co.uk)**

**For filling, healthy recipe ideas please visit [slimmingworld.co.uk](http://slimmingworld.co.uk)**



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