

# drink less



Your doctor or health worker has advised you that you are drinking at a level which can cause problems. Do you think your health or any part of your life may suffer because of your drinking?

The first section of this booklet will help you think about what alcohol can do to your health.

The second section of this booklet lays out a **SIX STEP PLAN** to help you change your drinking habits.

## Do you drink too much?

For many people, having a drink with friends is one of the pleasures of life. However, for others drinking leads to a variety of problems. This is because they drink too much, too often. Or they may drink too much in settings that put them at risk of harm e.g. drink driving.

How can you decide if you drink too much, too often? Firstly, you need to work out the number of standard drinks you usually have.

When people refer to a 'standard drink', they are referring to:



middy of beer  
(285mls)

OR



small glass  
of wine  
(100 mls)

OR



nip of spirits  
(30 mls)



Remember, standard drinks are small.

Most drinks are bigger.

The lifetime risk of harm from drinking alcohol increases with the amount consumed.

## **For healthy men and women**

- Drinking no more than two standard drinks per day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from disease or injury.

(NHMRC 2009)

On a single occasion of drinking, the risk of alcohol-related injury increases with the amount consumed.

### **For healthy men and women**

- Drinking no more than four standard drinks on any occasion reduces the risk of injury.

(NHMRC 2009)

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- For children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking is the safest option.
  - For women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

(NHMRC 2009)

If you drink above these safe limits you may have already experienced problems such as: feeling tired, carrying extra weight, getting hangovers or having periods of memory loss (blackouts).

Overall you're probably in worse physical shape. You may even embarrass yourself or other people after you have been drinking, or have unnecessary arguments. In the future you can develop more severe problems such as high blood pressure, brain damage and liver disease.





## Special conditions & risky times

There are times when you will be at risk after only 1 or 2 drinks, e.g. when operating machinery, driving a car or boat, swimming, or water-skiing. To avoid the risk of harm to yourself and others, the safest option is not to drink alcohol before or during such activities.

Some people have medical conditions which are made worse by alcohol. So sometimes you may need to set yourself a lower limit or avoid alcohol altogether.

Your liver takes a long time to break down alcohol. A healthy liver breaks down one standard drink per hour. Most people drink more than one standard drink per hour. The only thing that sobers you up is time. You cannot speed up your liver.

## What about driving?

Even with the best intentions it is difficult to ensure you stay under the limit if you are drinking. You are safest to leave your car at home if you are expecting to drink. And if you have a big drinking night, avoid driving the next morning.

If you're a P-plater or professional driver, by law you can't drink any alcohol before you drive.



## Should you cut down, or stop?

Most people who drink too much just need to cut down. Others will need to stop completely.

It is important that you **stop drinking** if:

- You regularly get early morning shakes after you have been drinking
- You find you can't control your drinking
- You have a health problem like liver disease.

A 'yes' to any one of these questions means you should stop drinking now.

## The six step plan for changing your drinking

After reading this far, you know quite a lot about the effects of alcohol and the problems they can cause for your health and your personal life.

In the rest of this booklet, we have laid out a **SIX STEP PLAN** that you can follow to help you cut down drinking. It won't always be easy. However, thousands of people before you have succeeded and feel a lot better for it. You can make that commitment too.

**You CAN do it!**

## **STEP 1**

### Identify good reasons for changing

Deciding on good reasons for changing a habit will help you to succeed. A good reason is one that makes sense to you. Right now think of some reasons for changing your drinking habits. To get you started, we have listed some examples.

- You'll have more time for things you've always wanted to do
- You'll save a lot of money and be able to spend it on other things you enjoy
- You'll feel happier
- You'll have more energy.

- You'll lose weight
- You'll sleep better
- You'll be less likely to have arguments
- Your children will be less likely to be drinkers
- Your memory will be better for much longer
- You will be less likely to get high blood pressure
- You'll be less likely to develop serious health problems such as liver disease
- You can probably think of other reasons too – which makes the most sense to you?





## **STEP 2**

### **Set your goals**

Having a plan for changing your drinking means you need to set goals to work towards. You can pick a day when you are going to start your plan and set your daily drinking goals each week. The next thing to do is to record your drinking – this will help you work out whether you're meeting your goals and keeping on track. We've included a set of diary pages to enable you to do this (see pages 20–25).

## REMEMBER

You can reduce health risks from drinking alcohol by:

- Drinking no more than two standard drinks per day. This reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury.

## AND

- Drinking no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion. This reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.
- For pregnant and breastfeeding women, children, and people under 18 years of age, not drinking is the safest option.

# 1 standard drink:



OR



OR



middy of beer  
(285mls)

small glass  
of wine  
(100 mls)

nip of spirits  
(30 mls)

Now have a look at the sample on the following page (18), and then:

- Write your starting date on the top of your first blank diary page on page 20.

**and**

- At the beginning of each week, write your daily drinking goals for the next seven days.



## Example of completed diary

My starting date is Monday 14/4

Week 1	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday	0	0
Tuesday	0	1
Wednesday	2	2
Thursday	2	3
Friday	2	5
Saturday	2	3
Sunday	2	6

This person started out well but did not achieve their goals for later in the week.

- The main thing to remember if you don't meet your goals is to keep on trying and to work out strategies to help you in the future
- We show you how to do this later in this book.

Week 1	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Week 2	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Week 3	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Week 4	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Week 5	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

Week 6	Drinking goal	Drinks consumed
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		



## **STEP 3**

### **Recognise difficult times**

No matter how much you want to change your drinking, there will be times when you find it difficult.

Stop and think for a moment about the last few times you were drinking too much. Where were you and what were you feeling?

The following is a list of common high risk times. You can use this list to help you think about your own high-risk times. In the next section we will get you to think of ways of coping with these difficult times.

- After work
- When meeting new people
- When I am out celebrating at a party or club
- When I've had a difficult day at work or looking after the children
- When I want to relax
- When I'm watching television
- When I feel lonely or depressed.

**Think of four high risk times when you are most likely to drink and write these down on pages 32 and 33**

# 4

## **STEP 4**

### Deal with difficult times

You now have a list of the hardest times for you – so you've already worked out when you are most likely to drink.

Now you have to work out how to deal with those difficult situations – without a drink in your hand.

IT WILL **HELP** if you:

**CHOOSE** one of the high-risk situations you have written down on pages 32 and 33.

**THINK** of ways to deal with that situation, and write them down on a separate piece of paper, no matter how simple they might seem. You can get some ideas from the list on the next page.

**PICK** two ideas that you think are the most practical and sensible to use in that situation.

Now repeat this process for your three other high risk times.

## Ways of coping with difficult times

- Avoid going to the pub after work – perhaps arrange a different activity e.g. going for a walk
- Avoid your friends who drink heavily
- Avoid situations in which you drink a lot
- Plan activities or tasks at times when you usually drink.

- When you're bored or stressed go for a walk
- Don't drink alcohol to quench your thirst
- Avoid salty nibbles when drinking – they'll make you more thirsty
- Eat a meal before drinking. It will make you feel more full and then you'll drink less
- Have a non-alcoholic drink before each alcoholic drink
- If under pressure to drink you might say 'I'm getting fit' or 'My doctor has told me to cut down'
- Remind yourself that the craving will be less if you occupy yourself with something else
- Remind yourself of how much healthier you are now that you've cut down your drinking

# 4

- Switch to low alcohol beer
- Switch to middies or pots, if you drink schooners of beer
- Dilute your drink e.g. add soda to wine and mixers to spirits
- Practise refusing alcoholic drinks
- Practise asking for a non-alcoholic drink.



For each of your high risk times, pick two coping strategies; write them down under each high risk time on the following pages.

### High risk time 1.

Ways of coping

1.

---

2.

---

### High risk time 2.

Ways of coping

1.

---

2.

---

### High risk time 3.

Ways of coping

1.

---

2.

---

### High risk time 4.

Ways of coping

1.

---

2.

---

Now you have planned ways for coping in difficult situations without drinking too much. If you go through these ways of coping in your mind before difficult situations occur, you will find them easier to deal with.

So, at a certain time each day, for example just before getting up in the morning, imagine each of your high-risk times. For each of these, imagine using one of your coping strategies. You should do this daily.

### **Imagine each high risk time and how you will cope.**

In practice, you might find that some of your coping strategies don't work. If they don't you can always go back to your original list or think of new ideas and try them instead. Alternatively, ask your doctor for more advice.

## **STEP 5**

### **Find someone to support you**

This plan is all about changing your habits. Some people find it easier to change a habit if they have someone to help them. This person could be your husband/wife/partner or someone at work who also wants to change their habits.

Your support person should be someone you can talk to easily, be honest with, and can ask for advice when you need it.

If you are very worried about the effects of drinking on your health, your doctor can help you. There are special alcohol counsellors for this reason, and a telephone number to contact them is listed on the back page of this booklet.

### **Ask someone to support you**

## **STEP 6**

### **Stick to your goals**

Drinking alcohol is an enjoyable part of many people's lives – a habit they'd feel lost without. This type of habit is hard to break. However, the information you've written down in this booklet will help you. It will also help if you:

#### **REMEMBER**

Every time you stop yourself from doing something by habit, you are one step nearer to breaking the habit altogether.

Feelings of longing for a drink will pass, especially if you're busy doing something else.

By talking to your 'supporter' you will get through difficult situations more easily.

## **FINALLY**

Take one day at a time and gradually it will get easier.

If you find yourself having one or two drinks too many, work out why and try to plan strategies so it won't happen again. Don't be discouraged or feel that you've failed – you're still well ahead of where you were when you first started reading this booklet.

Don't give in just because you've had a bad day.

If you feel you need more help, then specialist services are available. The phone numbers listed on the back page will put you in contact with these services.