

# Less alcohol is more money, energy and control

Thinking of cutting down?  
Need some help?  
This booklet is for you.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

# Less alcohol is more money, energy and control

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This booklet is not for you if you need to stop drinking or if you think you might be dependent on alcohol. It provides information but is not a substitute for talking to someone who is trained to help you. You can get contact details for Alcohol Counselling Services by contacting your GP or the HSE infoline 1850 24 1850.

# Less alcohol, more likely to avoid...

## Now

- Arguments
- Doing things you regret
- Unplanned or unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancy
- Blowing all your money on drink
- Nursing a hangover all weekend
- Accidents, injuries
- Being a victim of mugging, assault

## Down the road

- Break up of relationships
- Alcohol dependency
- Depression, anxiety
- Liver disease, certain cancers
- Money worries
- Job loss



## Rethinking your drinking

Start by listing the **good** things and **bad** things about your drinking.

Good things about my drinking	Bad things about my drinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps me relax</li> <li>• Gets me out of the house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rows</li> <li>• Always broke</li> </ul>
<p><i>These are examples – now write your own list</i></p>	

If you don't like some things about your drinking, you could benefit from cutting down.

### “But I'm no alcoholic”

You don't have to be dependent on alcohol to benefit from drinking less. If your drinking is linked to any problems that you have – small or serious – cutting down can help.

### Fact or Myth

**Alcohol problems are mostly caused by 'alcoholics'.**

**Myth** Immediate problems like motor accidents, violent assaults and accidental injury are mostly caused by moderate drinkers who occasionally overdo it.

# Earmark what you need to change

## Too much?

### *Low risk – weekly drinking limits*

UP TO 14 standard drinks a **week** for women  
UP TO 21 for men.

**Spread out** your drinking over the week with some alcohol-free days. (More about **weekly limits** and **standard drinks** on page 12)

**Binge drinking** – 6 or more drinks at a time. You are at greater risk of problems now (such as arguments, doing things you regret or accidents) and health problems in the future if you regularly binge drink.

## Too fast?

If you drink fast you get drunk and lose control more quickly. Drinking quickly puts a greater strain on your liver and body and it can be a warning sign of a drink problem developing. Try making every second drink a non-alcoholic drink.



## Other early warning signs of a drink problem include:

- High tolerance (can drink a lot before feeling drunk)
- Can't stop drinking once you start
- Secretly doubling up or sneaking drinks
- Blackouts
- Feeling guilty after drinking
- Needing a drink first thing in the morning to recover



## Fact or Myth

### Drinking coffee sobers you up

**Myth** Your liver is like a car with one gear. It can only work at one speed. So there is only one cure for drunkenness – time. Drinking coffee will make you wide awake and drunk. Taking a cold shower will make you cold, wet and drunk.

# Set targets

Now you've decided to cut down, set yourself some targets.

## Be specific

For example:

I will drink no more than \_\_\_ times a week

I will consume no more than \_\_\_ drinks each time

I will not drink when:

- I'm going to drive
- I'm working
- I haven't eaten
- I'm playing sport

These are examples, now write your own.

## Know your limit

**If you are honest, you know the point where you start to lose control. Your main target should be not to have more than this.**

## Warning

If you often drink heavily, or think you might be dependent on alcohol, it could be dangerous to make big changes to your drinking without medical support. Your GP or local Alcohol Counselling Service can help.

## Fact or Myth

**A 'blackout' is when you pass out from drink.**

**Myth** It's a type of memory loss. Your friends can recite what you did, but you can't. It is an early warning sign to cut down.

# Snaglist

Heavy drinking is usually linked to certain people, places and times. These could be your downfall when you try to cut down. Avoid this by making a snaglist of these situations and planning in advance how you will deal with them.

My snaglist	How I will deal with this
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting paid</li> <li>• Feeling lonely or bored</li> <li>• Tension at home</li> </ul>	

*Use this space to write your snag list and plan for dealing with situations.*

## Fact or Myth

**It is not safe to drink when you're pregnant.**

**Fact** The alcohol enters your baby's bloodstream, therefore the safest thing for your baby is not to drink at all. Regular heavy drinking can cause foetal alcohol syndrome, which causes serious developmental problems for your baby's development. Even occasional heavy drinking or 'binge' drinking can cause problems because of the high concentration of alcohol in your blood.



# Make a date



There is seldom an ideal time to cut down, so pick a time when you're not under too much pressure and go for it!

Remember to stick to your targets. Check your snaglist to help you avoid difficult situations.

## Tip off a friend

Tell close friends and family that you will be cutting down. Ask them to help by doing non-pub things with you and by backing you up when you are out.

## Fact or Myth

**Women can't 'hold' their drink as well as men.**

**Fact** Men have more bodily fluids than women, so alcohol is more diluted in their systems. This goes even for women and men of the same height and build.

# Ok, now what?

- **Be ready** for anyone who tries to push you into drinking. People respect your decision more when you're honest, but in the early days it might help to have a few excuses such as "I'm driving home", "I've a match in the morning" or "doctor's orders".
- Go out **later** and bring less money.
- **Don't borrow** and avoid running a tab.
- Steer clear of late-night **drinking parties**, and don't bring home take out drinks.

## Tips for slower drinking

- **Smaller drinks**, for example drink a glass, bottle or shandy instead of a pint or take a single instead of a double.
- **Leave your glass down** between sips, and leave it empty for a while before getting another.
- **Occupy yourself**. Play pool, music, dance or chat.
- **Why stick to minerals** to break up your alcoholic drinks? Try alcohol-free beers, wines or cocktails. This can be very effective for getting people off your case too.
- **Eat before and while you drink**.
- **Rounds** – avoid them. If it's too awkward, then buy yourself a mineral when it's your shout.

### Key to success

Have other things to do that don't involve alcohol such as family time, hobbies, a course, work. The less time you have for heavy drinking, the better your chance of success in the long run.

### Fact or Myth

**Alcohol is good for your heart.**

**Unknown** Evidence is mixed, but some experts suggest 1 or 2 drinks a day for women over the menopause and men over 40 can help reduce the risk of heart disease.



# Reap the rewards

Well done for getting this far.

**Reward** your hard work by buying something from the money saved on drink.

**Relish** the freedom from hangover and regrets.

If you feel yourself slipping, **Remind** yourself why you are cutting down, and of what you have gained so far.

## Feelings

If you use alcohol to help you express or cope with feelings (like shyness, tension or anger), then drinking less may leave you feeling more exposed. You will eventually need to take the time to work on this, and should seek help to get you through. Start by talking to those close to you and consider how the outside support of a counsellor might help.



## Fact or Myth

**Alcohol causes as much damage to society as heroin.**

**Myth** Alcohol causes much more damage than heroin and all the other illegal drugs put together. It is a factor in 88% of public order offences, 34% of marital breakdowns and 33% of fatal road accidents.

# End of the road?

A slip is not an excuse to give up, and it is definitely not the end of the road. It can take more than one attempt to successfully change your drinking. Find out why you slipped and plan how to avoid this next time. Set a new date and try again.

## Time please!

If you overdo it, give your body at least 48 hours without alcohol to recover.

## What if I keep slipping?

If you find it very difficult to control your drinking, you could be dependent on alcohol.

Other signs include:

- craving alcohol
- withdrawal symptoms like tremors, nausea, hot and cold sweats, anxiety, depression
- needing a drink first thing in the morning
- neglecting family or work because of your drinking

It can be hard to admit to a serious drink problem, but with help you can overcome it. Your GP can advise you about Alcohol Counselling Services or contact HSE infoline 1850 24 1850 or [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie) for contact details of services in your area.

## Fact or Myth

**There's nothing to do around here except drink.**

**Myth** Drinking is a big feature of Irish social life, but is not the only pastime. Take a minute to think of three non-drinking things you could do. It's just a matter of looking at things differently.

## Weekly drinking limits – low risk

### Low risk

Up to 14 standard drinks for women

Up to 21 standard drinks for men

Standard drinks (SD) contain roughly 10g of pure alcohol.

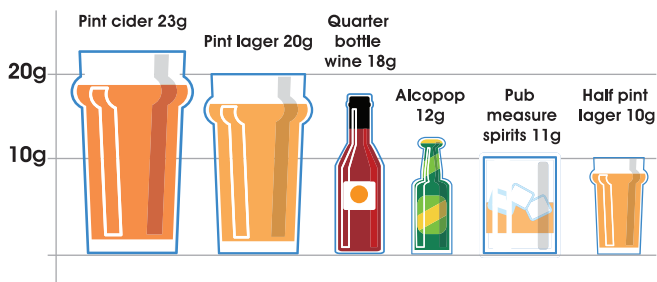
1 SD =  1/2 pint beer =  single measure spirit =  small glass wine

### A word of caution

There is mixed evidence about the use of weekly limits. They certainly do not apply to children or to adults who are pregnant, ill, run down or on medication.

### When is a drink not a standard drink?

Compare these selected drinks and note the vast differences in alcohol content.



### Say when – home measures

Home measures tend to be a lot larger than pub ones. If you're visiting, try a bottle or can instead of a short. It's easier to watch what you're having.





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**Further copies of this booklet  
are available from:**

- your local health promotion department
- HSE infoline 1850 24 1850
- [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)

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