

Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team

How to reduce your alcohol intake safely

Information for patients



This leaflet advises people who are physically dependent on alcohol, how to reduce their alcohol intake safely and gradually.

What is a unit?

Here are some examples of units.

Normal strength lager, beer, cider (3.5%) - 1 pint = 2 units.

Premium strength lager, cider (5-7%) - 1 pint = 3 units.

Super strength lager (8+%) - 1 pint / can = 4 units.

White cider (7.5%) - 1 litre = 7.5 units.

Wine – glass = 2-3 units. Bottle (11-14%) = 8-10 units.

Spirits - Bottle size - 350mls (or 35cl) = 14 units / 700mls (or 70cl) = 28 units / 1000mls (or 1litre) = 37.5 units

Alcopops - 1 bottle (330mls) = Typically 1.5 units.

Alcohol dependence

Someone who is physically dependant, will typically drink every day, and will often need to drink within a few hours of waking up in the morning.

However, the most important indicator that you're alcohol dependent is that if you suddenly stop drinking, or reduce your normal alcohol intake too quickly, you experience withdrawal symptoms.

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms include:

Tremor (shaking), sweating, feeling or being sick, palpitations, anxiety or irritability, disturbed sleep.

These may also include more serious withdrawal symptoms such as fits (seizures) or hallucinations (seeing things that aren't there). These more serious symptoms require immediate medical attention.

If you think you are alcohol dependent and suffer from withdrawal symptoms do not suddenly stop drinking as this can be dangerous to your health. It is therefore much safer to reduce gradually.

The severity of alcohol withdrawal can vary from person to person and one episode of alcohol withdrawal can differ to the next. Therefore, it is impossible to tell you exactly what to do, but instead, use the advice on the following pages to form a reduction plan that's right for you.

Alcohol withdrawal can make physical demands on the body that may put some people at increased risk. If you are unsure, it may be appropriate for you to discuss your general health and plans for cutting down with an alcohol worker or your GP. However, if you deem your health/symptoms a medical emergency, you can call 999 or access A&E.

How to reduce your daily drinking safely

Work out how many units you normally drink a day. This is your starting point.

- From your starting point, try to reduce by around 2 units per day.
- Remember, you are drinking to control withdrawal symptoms, not to get intoxicated.
- If you drink when waking in the morning, try to wait a little longer before your first drink each day (depending on the severity of your withdrawal symptoms).
- Try to only drink when you start to feel yourself withdraw.
- When this happens one approach may be to drink approximately 2 units at a time, then wait 20-30 minutes for the alcohol to take effect - repeat this process each time you get withdrawal symptoms.
- At bedtime, consider taking a double or triple dose of alcohol to help you sleep/ help to prevent or prolong withdrawal symptoms in the night.
- Keep a record of what you drink and when during the day – this will give you a guide on how much to reduce the next day.
- Once you get below your units (6 for women and 8 for men) it may be safe to stop altogether without risking serious alcohol withdrawal symptoms – however, discuss this with a health professional.
- If you are having withdrawal symptoms that are making you feel unwell, you may have cut down too quickly. If this is the case, it is worth discussing this with a health professional as soon as possible.

Look at your diet

People who drink often suffer with health problems caused by poor diet. You should take vitamin supplements which you can get from your GP or local supermarket, along with a balanced diet.

How to maintain the changes you've made

Concentrate on what you've gained (better health, more money etc.) rather than on what you have given up. Also, congratulate yourself when you're doing well, as cutting down requires will power and self control. Avoid high risk situations where drinking will be difficult to avoid. You could also consider other interests, like the cinema, exercise etc. Some people also need support around their drinking – if you feel you need this please refer to the support numbers on the following pages of this leaflet.

What if I need more support?

This leaflet may have been provided to you by the Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team at King's Mill Hospital during your attendance. We can provide some brief telephone support but we don't offer one to one/longer term support outside of hospital.

You can also get support from your GP who will give you advice and support about your drinking as well as your general health. Alternatively, you can access specialist community alcohol support via the contact details below:

Other support is available from:

- **Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team** at King's Mill Hospital (brief telephone advice only) – 01623 622515, extension 3935. Monday – Friday (excluding Bank Holidays) between the (approximate) hours of 9am – 4pm.
- **Change, Grow, Live (CGL)** – 01158 960798. The community alcohol support service if you live in the Nottinghamshire area (not Nottingham City).
- **Derbyshire Recovery Partnership** – 0845 308 4010. The community alcohol support service if you live in the Derbyshire area (not Derby City).
- **Hetty's** – 0800 085 0941. Support for carers and family members effected by someone's substance use. Nottinghamshire area only.
- **CRAFT** – 0845 308 4010. Support for carers and family members effected by someone's substance use. Derbyshire area only.

Further sources of information

Diabetes UK: www.diabetes.org.uk

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

King's Mill Hospital:

01623 672222

Newark Hospital:

01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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