

## Four Levels Of Drinking

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There are roughly four 'levels' of alcohol drinking - social, heavy, problem and dependent. As a rule, each level increases the risk to your health and safety.

### Social drinking

Most people drink some alcohol. However, even a small amount of alcohol can be dangerous if you drive, operate machinery, or take some types of medication.

### Heavy drinking

This is drinking above the recommended 'safe' limits which are:

- Men should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week (and no more than four units in any one day).
- Women should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week (and no more than three units in any one day).

One unit of alcohol is in about half a pint of beer, or two thirds of a small glass of wine, or one small pub measure of spirits. See leaflet called '**Alcohol and Sensible Drinking**' for details.

Drinking above the recommended safe limit increases your risk of developing diseases such as cirrhosis (liver damage), damage to the pancreas, certain cancers, heart problems, sexual problems, and other conditions. About 1 in 4 men, and about 1 in 7 women, drink more than the safe limit. In general, the more you drink, the greater the risk.

For example, if a man drinks five units each day (not greatly over the recommended limit) then, on average, he doubles his risk of developing liver disease, raised blood pressure, some cancers, and of having a violent death.

### Problem (harmful) drinking

This is where you continue to drink heavily even though you have caused harm, or are causing harm or problems to yourself, family, or society. For example, you may:

- have cirrhosis or another alcohol related condition.
- binge drink and get drunk quite often. This may cause you to lose time off work, or behave in an antisocial way when you drink. But note: not everybody with problem drinking binges or gets drunk. Many people with an alcohol related condition such as cirrhosis drink small amounts frequently, but do not get drunk.
- spend more money on alcohol than you can afford.
- have problems with your relationships or at work because of your drinking.

Many problem drinkers are not dependent on alcohol. They could stop drinking without withdrawal symptoms if they wanted to. But, for one reason or another, they continue to drink heavily.

### **Alcohol dependence (addiction)**

This is a serious situation where you drink every day, and need to drink to prevent unpleasant withdrawal symptoms (see below). In the UK about 2 in 100 women, and about 7 in 100 men, are alcohol dependent.

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