

# ALCOHOL & YOU

GET THE FACTS YOU NEED TO MAKE  
INFORMED DECISIONS ABOUT ALCOHOL



# DRINKAWARE

## < ABOUT DRINKAWARE

Drinkaware is an independent not-for-profit organisation with a vision of an Ireland where alcohol is not misused. Our mission is to work with others to fundamentally and permanently change attitudes and behaviours so that drinking to excess and drinking underage become unacceptable. We do this by raising awareness, creating understanding and supporting behaviour change through evidence-led education and effective communications.

We aim to encourage behaviour change by providing practical tools and resources to support our work in three key areas:

- < Tackling underage drinking
- < Reducing alcohol misuse
- < Supporting alcohol education

Drinkaware is determined to make a difference and firmly believe that our work will play a key role in changing attitudes towards harmful drinking and, in particular, help prevent future generations of people in Ireland from misusing alcohol.

## < GET THE FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL

Consumption of alcohol in Ireland is consistently higher than in many other countries. According to the World Health Organisation's Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health, the rate of binge drinking in Ireland is second highest in the WHO European Region<sup>1</sup>, with Irish research showing that 75% of alcohol was consumed as part of a binge drinking session in 2013.<sup>2</sup> With approximately 90 alcohol-related deaths per month, the range of harms and problems the misuse of alcohol presents in Irish society cannot be underestimated.

If you decide to drink alcohol, it's important to get the facts you need to make informed choices about your own drinking.

## < HOW MUCH AM I DRINKING?

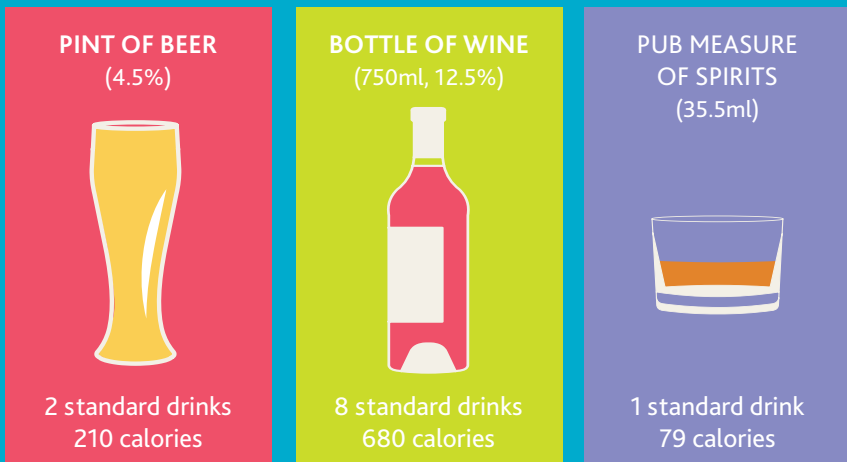
In Ireland, a standard drink is a measure of alcohol. It is important to be aware of a standard drink measure as it is a useful way to keep track of how much you are drinking on any given occasion.

One standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.<sup>3</sup> The number of standard drinks is based on the size of the drink and its alcohol strength, usually shown on labels as alcohol by volume (ABV).

### COMMON EXAMPLES OF ONE STANDARD DRINK:<sup>4</sup>



In addition to knowing how many standard drinks you consume, you should get to know how many calories are in your glass. One gram of alcohol contains seven calories, which is almost the same as pure fat (nine calories). Here are some examples to be aware of:<sup>5</sup>



## < HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

While standard drinks are a useful way to measure the amount of alcohol in each drink you consume, it is also important to be aware of how much you are drinking over time. The HSE low-risk guidelines for alcohol consumption are there to help you do just that.<sup>6</sup>

Up to **11** standard drinks (110g alcohol) spread out over one week



Up to **17** standard drinks (170g alcohol) spread out over one week

Drinks should be spaced out over the week and never consumed in one sitting, with at least two alcohol-free days. These guidelines are intended for adults only.

**THIS IS WHAT 11 STANDARD DRINKS LOOKS LIKE**



(one bottle of wine (12.5%) and three glasses of 4.5% beer)

**THIS IS WHAT 17 STANDARD DRINKS LOOKS LIKE**



(seven pints of beer (4.5%) and three pub measures of spirits)

## < WHAT IS BINGE DRINKING AND WHY IS IT DANGEROUS?

Binge drinking is when you drink six or more standard drinks on one occasion (for example, 3 pints of beer). Regularly drinking alcohol at this level can increase your risk of experiencing alcohol-related harms such as:

- < Accidents
- < Violence
- < Cancers
- < Injuries
- < Stomach disease
- < Stroke

In Ireland, we underestimate how much alcohol we drink by about 60%<sup>7</sup> so it is important to get into the habit of keeping track of how much you are drinking to make sure you don't exceed the guidelines. If you, or someone you know, regularly drinks above the guidelines it is advisable to cut down on how much alcohol you drink.

See our tips for cutting down on page 9.

### THERE ARE TIMES WHEN ALCOHOL SHOULD NOT BE CONSUMED AT ALL, INCLUDING WHEN:



Driving



Cycling



Pregnant



Caring for  
Children



Swimming



Operating  
Machinery

Those who experience chronic medical conditions, for example diabetes or epilepsy, should seek advice from their doctor before consuming alcohol.

USE OUR TRACKER ON PAGE 10 TO SEE HOW MUCH ALCOHOL YOU DRINK IN ONE WEEK

# HOW CAN ALCOHOL AFFECT ME?

## MENTAL HEALTH

Alcohol can have serious negative impacts on your mental health, affecting your ability to cope with everyday stresses.

There is a significant link between the misuse of alcohol and a range of mental health issues including depression, anxiety and suicide.<sup>8</sup>

## CANCER

Alcohol is known to be a contributing factor to seven types of cancer - cancer of the mouth, larynx (voicebox), throat, oesophagus (foodpipe), breast, liver and bowel.<sup>9</sup> In Ireland, over 900 new cancers, with 500 deaths, are attributed to alcohol every year.<sup>10</sup>

## FAMILY PROBLEMS

A 2014 report showed that one in ten Irish parents/guardians reported that children had experienced one or more harms in the past 12 months as a result of someone else's drinking, including verbal abuse, being left in unsafe situations, witnessing serious violence in the home or physical abuse.<sup>11</sup>

Drinking  
digestion  
stomach  
that  
gas  
the s  
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## WEIGHT GAIN

Alcohol is high in calories however these are 'empty calories'; they have no nutritional value. Remember to consider how many calories are in your glass the next time you drink alcohol.



## STOMACH DISORDERS

Drinking alcohol irritates your digestive system, causing your stomach to produce more acid than usual, which can lead to gastritis (the inflammation of stomach lining). This triggers vomiting, diarrhoea and, in heavy drinkers, even bleeding.




## BAD SLEEP

Even just a few drinks can interfere with the normal sleep process, affecting the quality of your sleep. If you regularly drink alcohol, your sleep patterns may be disturbed and you may have less energy than normal.



## HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

As you drink, your blood pressure rises and your heart rate increases. Regularly drinking over the low-risk guidelines can significantly increase your risk of high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke.<sup>12</sup>



## ◀ BENEFITS OF CUTTING DOWN

There are many benefits to drinking less alcohol and it won't take long to notice some of the positive outcomes from your efforts. Here are just some of the benefits to reducing the amount of alcohol you drink:

### IMPROVED MENTAL HEALTH

Alcohol can contribute to the development of mental health difficulties, as well as making existing problems worse. If you frequently feel low after drinking alcohol, reduce your intake and keep a diary to track any changes in how you feel.

### SAVE MONEY

People often don't consider how much money they are spending on alcohol. Work out how much on average you spend on alcohol in a week and multiply it by 52 to see your annual spend. If you were to set this aside every week, imagine how much you could save over time.

### INCREASED ENERGY

Alcohol can affect how well you sleep, often leaving you with a bad night's rest and less energy than normal the following day. Reduce your alcohol consumption to see the positive effect on your energy levels.

### BETTER LONG-TERM PHYSICAL HEALTH

Many alcohol-related health risks don't appear until later in life. Cutting down on how much alcohol you drink now will reduce your risk of developing serious health issues such as cancer, liver or heart disease in the future.

### APPEARANCE

Alcohol has a high calorie content and so, regularly drinking increases your calorie intake. Alcohol also dehydrates the body which can affect the appearance of your skin. Cutting down on how much you drink and opting for low-calorie alternatives can contribute to maintaining a healthy weight and appearance.

**TRY OUT SOME OF OUR TIPS TO CUT DOWN ON ALCOHOL ON THE NEXT PAGE**



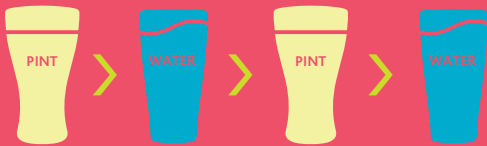
USUALLY  
DRINK PINTS?  
OPT FOR **HALF  
PINTS** OR  
**BOTTLES**  
INSTEAD.



DOWNSIZE  
YOUR DRINK.  
TRY A **LOWER  
STRENGTH**  
BEER OR  
**LOW  
ALCOHOL**  
WINE.



DON'T FORGET TO  
HYDRATE! **ALTERNATE**  
EACH DRINK WITH A  
GLASS OF **WATER**.



**NEVER TOP UP  
YOUR GLASS.**  
FINISH ONE  
GLASS OF  
WINE BEFORE  
POURING  
ANOTHER.



WHY NOT  
HAVE A  
**SPRITZER  
OR SHANDY?**  
YOU'LL  
HARDLY  
NOTICE THE  
DIFFERENCE.



**NEVER FREE-POUR  
SPIRITS, ALWAYS  
USE A MEASURE  
INSTEAD.**



ONE  
STANDARD  
DRINK

# YOUR WEEKLY DRINKS TRACKER

Up to **11** standard drinks  
(110g alcohol) spread  
out over one week



Up to **17** standard drinks  
(170g alcohol) spread  
out over one week

Download a monthly drinks tracker from our website: [drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie)

	Drinks Consumed	Standard Drinks	€ Spent	Comments
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
TOTALS	Total drinks consumed:	Total standard drinks:	Total spent:	Comments:

## < WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT?

If you are worried about your own or a loved one's drinking and need support, there are many services available across the country.

SEE OUR WEBSITE  
FOR A NATIONWIDE  
SUPPORT SERVICES  
DIRECTORY:  
[DRINKAWARE.IE](http://DRINKAWARE.IE)

The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline is a free and confidential, active listening helpline and email support service offering non-directive support, information, guidance and referral to anyone with a question or concern related to substance use.

FREEPHONE [1800 459 459](tel:1800459459)  
EMAIL [HELPLINE@HSE.IE](mailto:HELPLINE@HSE.IE)

## < REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation *Global Status Report on Alcohol and Health*. Available at: [http://www.who.int/substance\\_abuse/publications/global\\_alcohol\\_report/en/](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/publications/global_alcohol_report/en/)

<sup>2</sup> Long J & Mongan D (2013) *Alcohol consumption in Ireland 2013: analysis of a national alcohol diary survey*. Health Research Board.

<sup>3, 4, 5</sup> [http://www.drugs.ie/alcohol\\_info/tips\\_tools/how\\_much\\_am\\_i\\_drinking2/](http://www.drugs.ie/alcohol_info/tips_tools/how_much_am_i_drinking2/) [Accessed 08/02/2016]

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.hse.ie/eng/health/hl/change/Alcohol/> [Accessed 05/09/2016]

<sup>7</sup> Long J & Mongan D (2013) *Alcohol consumption in Ireland 2013: analysis of a national alcohol diary survey*. Health Research Board.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.yourmentalhealth.ie/About-Mental-Health/Common-problems/Things-that-impact-our-mental-health/Alcohol-drug-problems/> [Accessed 01/02/2016]

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk/healthy-lifestyle/alcohol-and-cancer> (Accessed 01/02/2016)

<sup>10</sup> Laffoy M, McCarthy T, Mullen L, Byrne D, Martin J (2013) *Cancer incidence and mortality due to alcohol: an analysis of 10-year data*. Irish Medical Journal.

<sup>11</sup> A. Hope (2014) *Alcohol's harm to others in Ireland*. Dublin: Health Service Executive.

<sup>12</sup> Irish Heart Foundation 'Say when sooner' magazine. Available at: [www.irisheart.ie](http://www.irisheart.ie)

< VISIT **DRINKAWARE.IE**  
TO TRY OUT OUR  
HANDY DRINKS  
CALCULATOR



# DRINKAWARE

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The information in this booklet is not to be considered as medical advice. Always seek professional medical advice from a registered doctor or nurse.