

❖ ALCOHOL

There has been a lot of discussion about limiting the amount of alcohol throughout many of these articles as there are short and long term risks of drinking in excess. Especially with the recent alcohol fuelled violence on our streets becoming out of hand, it may be a good time to review your drinking habits and cut back.

How much should I be allowed to drink?

Clearly having a drink or two on the weekend is not the target audience that needs to limit or reduce how much is consumed. It is those that 'binge drink' or drink on a daily basis that may be posing some risks to their health.

The national guidelines suggest that not drinking for people under the age of 18 is the safest option and people under 15 years are at the highest risk from alcohol so should not drink at all.

For adults, the recommendation is to have no more than **2 standard drinks on any day** to reduce the risks over a lifetime. Drinking no more than **4 standard drinks on a single day** reduces the risk and injury from that occasion.

For the full details and the current guidelines set by the NHRMC (National Health and Medical Research Council) see their website: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/your-health/alcohol-guidelines>

What are the short term risks of drinking alcohol?

Consuming alcohol in excess can cause;

- × Poor decision making
- × Increased reckless behaviour
- × Increase in fluid retention
- × Drowsiness which can increase the risk of falls and impair your breathing
- × Slurred speech
- × Black-outs if drinking too much
- × Upset stomach; pain, diarrhoea, vomiting
- × Dehydration

What are the long term risks of drinking alcohol?

Consuming alcohol in the long term may cause;

- × Weight gain especially around the stomach area which is the most dangerous place for your heart
- × Cirrhosis or fattening of the liver
- × Fluid retention
- × High blood pressure
- × Memory loss and cognitive decline
- × Vitamin B1 deficiency which can affect the memory and mental function
- × Stomach ulcers/bleeding/cancer
- × Behavioural/social issues; no longer working or domestic violence which may break up families.

What medications can or can't you take with alcohol?

There are some medications that you should not combine with ANY alcohol because of the side effects or it may increase the effects of alcohol. Whereas, there are some that it appears ok to have 1 or 2 standard drinks with if you wish.

However, I always have felt that putting less 'toxins' into your body will be much better for your liver and put less 'stress' on it. Heavy drinking with any medications is never recommended for this reason and if unsure about what you are taking then check with your pharmacist or doctor first.

I have tried to list whether or not it is safe to drink alcohol with common over-the-counter, prescription and natural health products. It is not a 'definitive' list, but rather what some studies have shown, or what in theory may happen if you use the combination in a SMALL amount (any binge drinking will be harmful to you regardless of what the list says!)

Should I drink whilst I'm pregnant or breastfeeding?

The current guidelines state that it is safest option for pregnant and breastfeeding Mothers not to drink alcohol. This is because it can pass through the placenta and through breast-milk which may affect the baby.

How do I know what is a standard drink?

Although in Australia all bottles, cans and casks needs to state how many standard drinks are in them it can be very hard if you are drinking at a bar or pub where all types of drinks and places you go have different amounts making up a standard drink!

Again according to the NHMRC, the following should be a standard drink:

<u>TYPE OF DRINK</u>	<u># OF STANDARD DRINKS</u>
Can/Stubbie low strength beer	0.8
Can/Stubbie mid-strength beer	1
Can/Stubbie full-strength beer	1.4
100mL wine (13.5% alcohol)	1
30mL nip spirits	1
Can spirits (approx. 5% alcohol)	1.2-1.7
Can spirits (approx. 7% alcohol)	1.6-2.4

Download their chart that clearly illustrates the huge ranges in standard drinks at http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files/nhmrc/file/your_health/healthy/alcohol/std-drinks.pdf

Where can I go if I or someone in my family has a problem with alcohol?

There are many resources in Australia to help you talk about your alcohol use in a non-judgemental environment. The most important thing is to not be afraid and use the place that you feel comfortable talking openly and honestly.

1. Your GP: is an excellent tool. They can direct you to where you need to go and is the first step in your recovery
2. LifeLine: 13 11 14
3. Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
4. Drink wise Australia National Support Services: Counselling 24/7: 1800 888 236
5. Family Drug Support: 1300 568 186
6. Government Alcohol and Drug information in each State/Territory:
 - ACT: 02 6207 9977
 - NSW: 02 9361 8000, country: 1800 422 599
 - SA: 1300 131 340
 - VIC: 1800 888 236
 - NT: 1800 131 350
 - QLD" 1800 177 883
 - TAS: 1800 811 994
 - WA: 08 9442 5000, country: 1800 198 024