


Know your numbers

Are you drinking too much?



Having the occasional drink does not harm your body. Normally the effects of alcohol are short-lived – the liver breaks the alcohol down and eliminates it from the body, taking about an hour for every unit consumed. But regularly drinking above the recommended levels can be hazardous to your health.

What are the recommended drinking levels?

The UK Department of Health's current advice on sensible drinking is:

- Men – up to 3-4 units per day, or 21 units a week
- Women – up to 2-3 units per day, or 14 units a week
- Plus, both men and women should have two days a week free of alcohol

Question 1

Before completing this question you will need to first look at the fact sheet 'The unit values of popular drinks'. That's because the unit value of a standard drink (e.g. a pint of lager or a glass of wine) will be different depending on its alcoholic strength.

First of all think back over the last 7 days and write down the number of drinks you had each day – the type of drink, its strength and the size of the drink. You may find it easier to keep a drinks diary for the next 7 days and then complete the following questions:

	Over the last 7 days, did you...	Yes / No
Men	Drink more than 3-4 units per day or 21 units a week?	
Women	Drink more than 2-3 units per day or 14 units a week?	
Men & Women	Have two days that were alcohol free?	
Men & Women	Was what you drank over the last 7 days a typical week?	

If you answered 'YES' to any of the above questions, and the last 7 days was a typical week then please continue to the Question 2.

If you answered 'NO' to all of the above questions and the last 7 days was a typical week, then it would appear that your drinking is not likely to be hazardous to your health, but beware of Binge Drinking.

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Are you drinking too much? contd.

Question 2

It is often very difficult to distinguish between drinking a little too much, problem drinking, alcohol abuse and alcoholism, but basically someone whose intake of alcohol is 'hazardous' is drinking heavily enough to cause harm in the future.

If you drank more than the recommended guidelines in the last 7 days and that was a typical week, then your alcohol intake would be classified as 'potentially harmful' and it could already be damaging your health. The following test will determine whether you're drinking is hazardous:

Questions	0	1	2	3	4	Your Score
How often do you have 8 (men)/6 (women) or more drinks on one occasion						
Only answer the following questions if your answer above is monthly or less						
How often in the last year have you not been able to remember what happened when drinking the night before?						
How often in the last year have you failed to do what was expected of you because of drinking						
Has a relative/ friend/ doctor/ health worker been concerned about your drinking or advised you to cut down?						

Scoring: A total of 3+ indicates hazardous or harmful drinking

If you are concerned about your own drinking, or worried about a family member or friend:

Call the National Drink Helpline - Drinkline - on 0800 917 8282 for FREE advice & support.