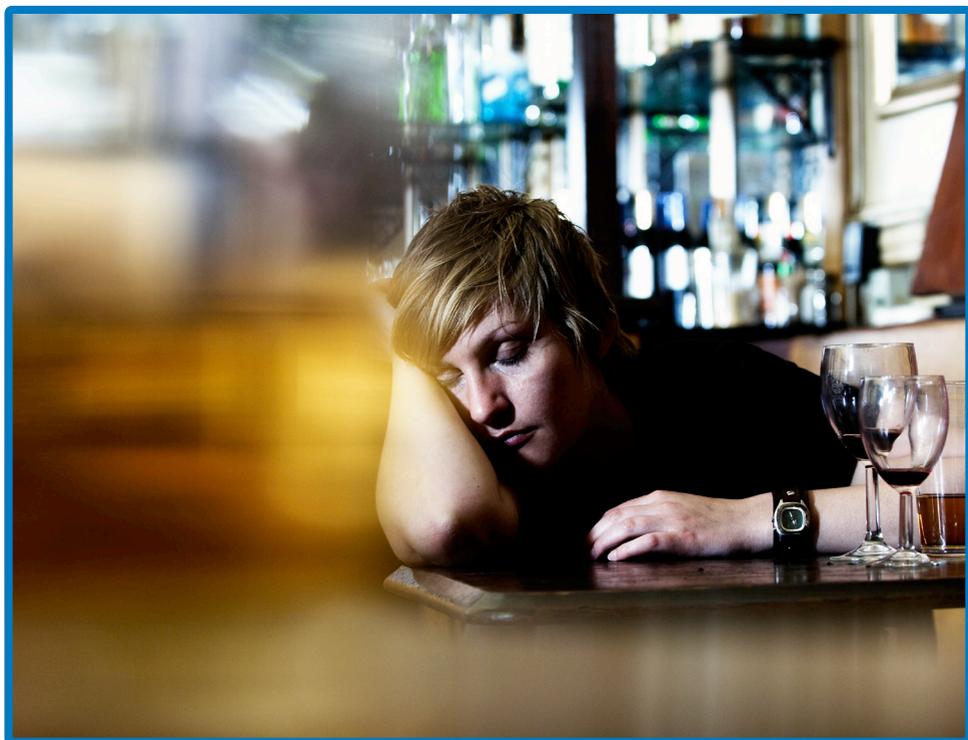




University Hospitals Bristol
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service
Bristol Royal Infirmary

Alcohol and safety



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Personal safety is our ability to go about our everyday lives without fear or threat of violence or aggression. Going on a night out should be an enjoyable experience if alcohol is used responsibly and we are in control of our actions and behaviour.

How can alcohol affect our safety?

Evidence shows that people who have been drinking alcohol are more at risk of being the victim or perpetrator of attacks, robberies, muggings and sexual assaults.

An estimated 23,000 alcohol-related incidents take place in the UK each week. Regular visitors to pubs and clubs are twice as likely to be victims of assault. This is because when we drink alcohol, we are not as fully in control as we are when sober.

Alcohol can:

- affect our judgement and make it harder to decide what is safe and is not safe. Our judgement of character can also be affected
- lower our inhibitions, which makes us less worried that something bad may happen
- make us more excitable, which can get us into dangerous situations as a result
- slow our reaction times, affecting vision, balance and making bodily movements harder to control.

When you have been drinking alcohol, it is important to avoid doing anything that involves physical co-ordination or quick reactions. Too much alcohol can make you prone to accidents.

Top 10 tips for staying safe when drinking alcohol

1. Don't let people pressurise you to drink enough to make you feel drunk.
2. If you are out with friends, look after each other and stick together. Do not be tempted to wander off alone, or with people you don't know.
3. Be aware that you may appear threatening towards other people when drunk, and this may impact on how they behave towards you.
4. If you encounter a potentially aggressive situation, try to talk your way out of it. Avoid using aggressive body language or words.
5. No matter how much you feel able to look after yourself, you should never attempt to compete with weapons or gangs. If you find yourself in this situation, get away as fast as you can.
6. Trust your instincts – they are there to warn you of danger.
7. Get home safely. It can be difficult to find a taxi at the end of the night, so booking one in advance is always helpful, and keep the numbers of local taxi companies in your phone. If you are walking home, walk with someone you know and trust. If you are going home alone, arrange to phone someone when you get there so they know you are safe. Never go off with someone you have just met.

8. When you are in a busy pub or club, there is a risk of drink spiking (where alcohol or drugs are added to your drinks without your knowledge). Keep your drinks with you, and do not leave them out of view. Be aware that the alcohol itself is still the most likely risk to your personal safety.
9. Mixing alcohol with stimulant drugs (such as cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines) may mean you end up drinking more. This is because the effects of the drugs mask the effects of the alcohol, and you do not realise how drunk you may have become.
10. Never leave a drunk person on their own, especially if they are sleepy. Turn them on their side (recovery position) so that if they are sick, they won't choke. If you can't wake them and they are causing you concern, call 999. Keep them warm and stay with them until help arrives.

Alcohol and driving

Although there is a legal limit for how much alcohol a person can drink and still drive, there is no safe limit for drinking and driving. It is important to remember that even one drink can affect your judgement and reaction times.

Even at the legal limit, your chances of having an accident are more than doubled. If you have been drinking a lot of alcohol the night before, you will still have alcohol in your bloodstream the next morning. Nearly one in six convicted drink-drivers are caught the morning after drinking.

Alcohol, sexual health and safety

Alcohol can reduce your sexual inhibitions, which in the wrong circumstances can result in disaster. If you are drunk and can't look out for yourself properly, you may be at risk of being taken advantage of sexually. Alcohol is the most common date rape drug.

If you are out drinking and decide to go home with someone you don't know, it is important to consider whether you feel safe and comfortable with this decision.

Keeping safe means:

- thinking twice before going home with a stranger – it's safer to get their number and arrange to meet up another time
- being clear about whether you are comfortable having sex and not letting alcohol influence your decision
- using a condom to protect yourself and others from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections
- not drinking so much that you can't say no.

The NHS recommends that if you drink alcohol there is no safe level.

Men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol per week. Ideally this should be spread evenly over three days or more.

Women who are pregnant should not drink alcohol at all.

Contacts

ROADS: 0117 440 0540 (Bristol)

DHI: 01454 868 750 (South Gloucestershire)

Addaction: 01934 427 940 (Weston-Super-Mare)

Advocacy service: 0117 980 0376

Alcoholics anonymous Bristol: 0117 926 5926 or 24 hour service:
0117 926 5520 or the national helpline: 0800 917 7650

SMART Recovery: 0117 922 2364

SWAN Project: 0117 989 2521

Hawksprings: 0117 964 2859

NHS Advice: 111

Drinkline: 0800 917 8282 (9am – 11pm, Monday to Friday)

www.drinkaware.co.uk

www.nhs.uk/drinkcheck

For loved ones, family and friends of someone who has alcohol problems

DHI: 0117 916 6588

Al-Anon: 0800 0086 811

As well as providing clinical care, our Trust has an important role in research. This allows us to discover new and improved ways of treating patients.

While under our care, you may be invited to take part in research. To find out more please visit:
www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/research-innovation

For access to other patient leaflets and information please go to the following address:

www.uhbristol.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/information-for-patients/

Hospital switchboard: 0117 923 0000



Minicom: 0117 934 9869



www.uhbristol.nhs.uk



For an interpreter or signer please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter.



For this leaflet in large print or PDF format, please email patientleaflets@uhbristol.nhs.uk.

