



University Hospitals Bristol
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient information service
Bristol Royal Infirmary

Alcohol dependence

How to reduce your intake safely



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Alcohol dependence

There are a few ways to identify whether you are physically dependent on alcohol. Someone who is physically dependent will typically drink every day, and will often need to drink within a few hours of waking up in the morning. However, the most important indicator of alcohol dependence is withdrawal symptoms if you suddenly stop drinking, or reduce your normal alcohol intake too quickly.

Alcohol withdrawal symptoms include:

Tremor, sweating, feeling or being sick, palpitations, anxiety or irritability, disturbed sleep. These may also include fits (seizures) or hallucinations (seeing things that aren't there).

If you think you are alcohol dependent and suffer from withdrawal symptoms, do not suddenly stop drinking, as this can be dangerous to your health. It is therefore much safer to reduce gradually.

The severity of alcohol withdrawal can vary from person to person. One episode of alcohol withdrawal can differ from the next. It is impossible to tell you exactly what to do, but instead, use the advice on the next page to form a reduction plan that's right for you.

Disclaimer

This leaflet cannot replace professional advice. Alcohol withdrawal can make physical demands on the body that may put some people at increased risk. If you are unsure, you should discuss your general health and plans for cutting down with an alcohol worker or your GP.

What is a unit?

The strength and units within a drink can vary considerably. Here are some examples of drinks with approximate units.

Normal strength lager, beer, cider (3 to 4%)

1 pint = 2 units

Premium strength lager, cider (5 to 6%)

1 pint = 3 units

Super strength lager (8+%)

1 pint = 4 units

White cider (7.5%)

1 litre = 7.5 units

Wine (11 to 14%)

125ml glass = 1.5 units.

175ml glass = 2 units.

Bottle = 8 to 10 units

Spirits (approx. 37.5%)

Single measure = 1 unit.

350ml bottle = 13 units.

700ml bottle (or 70cl) = 26 units.

1,000ml bottle (or 1litre) = 37.5 units.

Alcopops

1 bottle (330mls) = Typically 1.5 units.

How to reduce your daily drinking safely

The rate you reduce your drinking is up to you, as you are in control.

It's important to try to strike a balance between not cutting down so quickly that you get severe withdrawal symptoms and not so slowly that you never actually stop!

Work out how many units you normally drink a day. This is your starting point.

From your starting point, a sensible approach is to try to reduce by two to five units per day.

Remember, you are drinking to control withdrawal symptoms, not to get intoxicated

Do not assume you have to have a drink straight away after waking up. Try drinking nothing until you notice withdrawal symptoms.

Try to drink only when you start to feel yourself withdraw and then drink approximately two units at a time. Wait 20 to 30 minutes for the alcohol to take effect, and repeat this process each time you get withdrawal symptoms.

If you experience disturbed or disrupted sleep due to withdrawal symptoms, you could try a double dose before bed.

Remember, as you successfully reduce your daily alcohol intake, you should find your withdrawal symptoms become less severe.

Keep a daily record of what and when you drink and what withdrawal symptoms you get. This will help you keep track of your progress and give you a guide to how much you should reduce the next day .

If you are having withdrawal symptoms that are making you feel unwell, you may have cut down too quickly. If this is the case, you should discuss this with a health professional as soon as possible.

Look at your diet

People who drink often suffer with health problems caused by poor diet. It may be necessary to take vitamin supplements, which you can get from your GP, along with a balanced diet.

How to maintain the changes you've made

Concentrate on what you've gained (better health, more money etc), rather than on what you've given up. Also, congratulate yourself when you're doing well, as cutting down requires will power and self control.

Avoid high risk situations where drinking will be a temptation. You could also consider other interests, like the cinema, exercise etc.

Some people need support around their drinking. If you feel you need this please use the contact details mentioned on page 7.

You can also talk to your GP.

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

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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



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



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