

# Mental health in primary care

## Alcohol problems

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**There is one unit of alcohol in:**

½ pint of ordinary strength beer, lager or cider

¼ pint of extra strength beer, lager or cider

1 small glass of white (8 or 9% ABV) wine

2/3 small glass of red (11 or 12% ABV) wine

1 single measure of spirits (30 ml)

### Common symptoms

#### 'High-risk'

##### drinking:

**Men**

More than three units

alcohol/day

(21 units/week)

**Women**

More than two units

alcohol/day

(14 units/week)

↓  
Many have no  
symptoms but  
are at risk

##### Psychological:

- ➔ Poor concentration
- ➔ Sleep problems
- ➔ Less able to think clearly
- ➔ Depression
- ➔ Anxiety/stress

##### Physical:

- ➔ Hangovers/blackouts
- ➔ Injuries
- ➔ Tiredness/lack of energy
- ➔ Weight gain
- ➔ Poor coordination
- ➔ High blood pressure
- ➔ Impotence
- ➔ Vomiting/nausea
- ➔ Gastritis/diarrhoea
- ➔ Liver disease
- ➔ Brain damage

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- ➔ Difficulties and arguments with family/friends
  - ➔ Difficulties performing at work/home
  - ➔ Withdrawal from friends and social activities
  - ➔ Legal problems.

### Alcohol problems are treatable

Alcohol problems *do not* mean weakness

Alcohol problems *do not* mean you are a bad person

Alcohol problems *do* mean that you have a medical problem or a lifestyle problem.

### What treatments can help?

*Both therapies are most often needed:*

#### Supportive therapy:

- ➔ to reduce drinking
- ➔ to stop drinking
- ➔ for stress
- ➔ for prevention of life problems
- ➔ for education of the family members for support.

#### Medication:

- ➔ for moderate to severe withdrawal
- ➔ for physical problems
- ➔ consider for relapse prevention.

## Set goals: acceptable levels of drinking

### Who?

### How many drinks?

### How often?

Men No more than three units

Each day (only for five days/week)

Women No more than two units

Each day (only for five days/week)

Have two non-alcohol drinking days/week.

*Keep in mind: the less the person drinks, the better it is.*

- ➔ Pregnancy
- ➔ Physical alcohol dependence
- ➔ Physical problems made worse by drinking
- ➔ Driving, biking
- ➔ Operating machinery
- ➔ Exercising (swimming, jogging, etc.)

➔ Recommendation is not to drink

## Determine action: how to reach target levels

- ➔ Keep track of your alcohol consumption
- ➔ Turn to family and/or friends for support
- ➔ Have one or more non-alcoholic drinks before each drink
- ➔ Delay the time of day that you drink
- ➔ Take smaller sips
- ➔ Engage in alternative activities at times that you would normally drink (eg when you are feeling bored or stressed)
- ➔ Switch to low alcoholic drinks
- ➔ Decide on non-drinking days (2 days or more per week)
- ➔ Eat before starting to drink
- ➔ Join a support group
- ➔ Quench your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks
- ➔ Avoid or reduce time spent with heavy-drinking friends
- ➔ Avoid bars, cafes or former drinking places.

## Review progress: are you keeping on track?

### Questions to ask:

- ➔ Am I keeping to my goals?
- ➔ What are the difficult times?
- ➔ Am I losing motivation?
- ➔ Do I need more help?

### Progress tips:

- ➔ Every week, record how much you drink over the week
- ➔ Avoid these difficult situations or plan activities to help you cope with them
- ➔ Think back to your original reasons for cutting down or stopping
- ➔ Come back for help, talk to family and friends.