GUIDE TO ALCOHOL AWARENESS

Raise your awareness of the effects of alcohol

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INTRODUCTION

Most people in the UK enjoy a drink or two but few of us stop to consider the effect alcohol can have on our health. You don't have to be an alcoholic to be at risk of damaging your health. Regularly drinking just above recommended levels can be harmful.

Use this guide to raise your awareness of the effects alcohol could be having on you.

QUICK FACT

Men who regularly drink more than 2 pints of strong (5.2%) lager every day:

- are more than three times more likely to get mouth cancer.
- could be three times more likely to have a stroke.[1]

THE EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a drug. It comes from the Arabic word which means 'all things very fine'. When you drink alcohol it is absorbed into the bloodstream within minutes. You can start to feel the effects almost immediately.

Long Term Effects

Alcohol's hidden harms usually only emerge after a number of years. And by then, serious health problems could have developed.

Liver problems, reduced fertility, high blood pressure, increased risk of various cancers and heart attack are some of the numerous harmful effects of regularly drinking above recommended levels.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists suggests that you may be at risk from drinking too much alcohol if[2]:

- You regularly use alcohol to cope with anger, frustration, anxiety or depression.
- You regularly use alcohol to feel confident.
- Your drinking affects your relationships with other people.
- You hide the amount you drink from friends and family.
- You need to drink more and more to feel good.
- You stop doing other things to spend more time drinking.
- You start to feel shaky and anxious the morning after drinking the night before.
- You drink to stop these feelings.
- You start drinking earlier in the day.

HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

People often talk about alcohol in terms of 'units'. One unit contains 8g (10ml) of pure alcohol. Drinks contain different amounts of alcohol depending on their size and strength.

Strict new guidelines on alcohol consumption from the Chief Medical Officer for England 2016 have drastically cut the recommended drinking limits and say there is no safe level of drinking.

The new guidance advises that men and women who drink regularly should consume no more than 14 units per week, which is equivalent to 6 pints of beer or 7 glasses of wine. The recommendations also say that pregnant women should not drink at all

1 can of standard lager, beer or bitter
1.8 units

1 can of strong lager, beer or bitter
2.2 units

1 pint of standard lager, beer or bitter
2 units

1 pint of strong lager, beer or bitter
3 units

1 one litre bottle of standard cider
4 units

1 one litre bottle of strong cider
9 units

1 bottle 'alcopops'
1.5 units

1 measure of spirits (25ml)
1 units

1 small glass of wine (125ml)
1.5 units

1 large glass of wine (250ml)
3 units

1 standard glass of wine (175ml)
2.1 units

ALCOHOL AND WORK: WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Workplaces reflect local communities. Because alcohol abuse is a significant social problem, it's also a workplace issue[4].

Inappropriate drinking before, during and after work can increase on-the-job accidents at work, affect performance, morale and result in loss of productivity. It can also affect your relationships, behaviours and impact on work attendance.

Drinkaware research has shown that in the months since the start of the recession there has been a change in the UK's alcohol consumption patterns, such as people turning to alcohol to cope with redundancy.

Helpful tips on cutting down or doing without alcohol:

- Have your alcoholic drink after starting to eat.
- Quench your thirst with non-alcoholic drinks before having an alcoholic one.
- Have a non-alcoholic drink before every alcoholic drink.
- Switch to low-alcohol beer.
- Take smaller sips.
- Plan activities or tasks at those times that you usually drink.
- When bored or stressed have a physical workout instead of drinking.
- Explore new interests - fishing, cinema, social club, exercise.
- Avoid routinely going to the pub after work.
- Avoid, or limit where possible, time with your "heavy" drinking friends.

QUICK FACT

16% of drinkers engage in binge drinking.[5]

DRINK DIARY

Keeping a drink diary is a popular tool to help you cut down. Here's how a drink diary could help you:

- Write down how much alcohol you have to drink over one week.
- Try to work out when you found it most difficult to cut down.
- Plan to avoid these situations or plan activities to help you cope with them.
- Ask someone close to you to support and help you.
- Remind yourself and think carefully of all your reasons for cutting down.

QUICK FACT

Experts estimate alcohol is responsible for at least 33,000 deaths in the UK each year.[1]

GETTING HELP

You can talk to your GP if you are finding it hard to change your drinking habits. You can also consider the following helpful sources:

RECOMMENDED BOOKS TO READ

Edmund Tirbutt, Helen Tirbutt: Beat the Booze: A comprehensive guide to combating drink problems in all walks of life

Dr Tim Cantopher: Dying for a drink

USEFUL LINKS

Drinkaware: **www.drinkaware.co.uk**

Alcoholics Anonymous: **www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk**

NHS alcohol tracker tool: **www.nhs.uk/Tools/Pages/NHSAlcoholtracker.aspx**

Alcohol Concern: **www.downyourdrink.org.uk**

http://www.drugfreeworld.org/drugfacts/alcohol

REFERENCES

1. Drinkaware: www.drinkaware.co.uk/facts/effects-of-alcohol-2
2. Royal Society of Psychiatrists:
   www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfoforall/problems/alcoholanddrugs/alcoholourfavouritedrug.aspx
3. NHS choices: www.nhs.uk/chq/Pages/853.aspx?CategoryID=87&SubCategoryID=871
4. Trade Union Congress Drug and Alcohol Support at work:
   www.worksmart.org.uk/health/viewsubsection.php?sun=16

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