

# 22 tips to reduce alcohol related harm

CADS are committed to reducing the harms caused by alcohol (and other drugs). One way we do this is by providing information so people can make an informed choice to reduce how much and how often they drink or to give up alcohol completely. Whatever you choose needs to be a realistic target and we can support you to reach your goal.

As with any substance, no use is the safest option. However, if you are choosing to drink alcohol here are 22 ways you can reduce potential harms so you and others stay safe.

## 1. Eat before you drink alcohol

→ Eating before moderate drinking can slow down alcohol's effect on you. Eat proteins and carbohydrates (e.g. eggs, chicken, pizza) before and while you are drinking. Eating *after* you have drunk alcohol has little or no effect.

## 2. Avoid pre-loading / pre-drinking

→ Drinking copious amounts of alcohol before a night out or social event (or even drinking with dinner) not only increases your daily alcohol consumption but it means you may arrive at an event way more drunk than you intended which increases the risks of lowered boundaries and bad decisions like taking drugs you didn't mean to, sleeping with someone you didn't want to, etc.

## 3. Stay well hydrated with water

→ You need to drink water *before, during and after* drinking alcohol to reduce the effects of dehydration  
→ Having water in your system before you start drinking keeps you from feeling thirsty so you will drink more slowly. This in turn means you can drink less and avoid the harms that come with drinking too much.

## 4. Pace your drinks: take smaller sips and put the glass down between each sip

→ If you hold onto your glass you tend to drink more. Take small sips occasionally rather than gulping your drink. It takes about one hour (more for women) for your liver to metabolise one standard drink  
→ Try using a smaller glass, dilute your alcoholic drinks or switch to a lower or zero alcohol drink.

## 5. Alternate alcohol drinks with non- alcohol or zero-alcohol drinks

→ Next to your drink containing alcohol always have a glass of water, plain soft drink or fruit juice and sip both. This reduces how much alcohol you drink Before having a drink be aware of what percentage of alcohol you are drinking.

## 6. Drink for taste

→ Enjoy the taste and savour each mouthful.



## 7. Avoid drinking in rounds or keeping up with others

→ Buy your own drinks or buy one round only then go solo buying your own drinks from then on.

## 8. Plan your drinking time and for alcohol free days every week

- Plan your drinking time –begin drinking later and leaving the pub/club earlier. For example if you normally start drinking at 5.00pm try starting at 7.00pm and leaving earlier.
- Each week make a plan for days with no alcohol and for days where you drink moderately. Take into account work, family and other commitments
- Not drinking for a couple of days a week can boost your confidence. It shows you can change a habit and feel good without alcohol. You could discuss this or get support from a range of people and resources. (See point 22)
- Visit the Hello Sunday morning website at [www.hellosundaymorning.org](http://www.hellosundaymorning.org) and sign up to commit to a period of time without alcohol
- Two alcohol free days a week is recommended by the World Health Organisation. For more information see [www.hpa.org.nz/what-we-do/alcohol](http://www.hpa.org.nz/what-we-do/alcohol)

## 9. Occupy yourself

→ Try something else you enjoy while drinking to help distract your attention from the glass.

## 10. Manage cravings for alcohol with food or activity

→ If you crave alcohol delay the decision to drink for half an hour by distracting yourself – do some exercise or go for a walk or have something to eat as this can reduce the cravings for alcohol – though avoid salty snacks which make you thirsty

## 11. Measure your drinks and set a limit

→ Know how many standard drinks you are drinking. At home, pour a standard drink and compare that with what you are drinking. Set yourself a limit about what you will drink when you are out (see Recommended Drinking Guidelines p4).

## 12. Count and record your drinks

- A drinking diary can help you see your drinking pattern. (You can find drink diaries and apps online.)
- In it you write down the day, time, number of hours spent drinking, the place and company. Record how you felt when you drank and when you didn't. Record what you are drinking as soon as you can.

## 13. Avoid mixing alcohol with other drugs

- Mixing alcohol with other drugs is potentially dangerous. Breathing and other central nervous system activity can slow down to a point where a person can slip into a coma and die. This is especially so with medications that have a sedative effect including:
  - benzodiazepines like Diazepam (Valium), Clonazepam, and Lorazepam (Ativan)
  - the many new types of benzodiazepines that are available from the dark web
  - non-benzodiazepine hypnotics like Zopiclone (apo-zopiclone)
  - opiates like morphine, oxycodone, tramadol and codeine
  - other drugs like ketamine
- NEVER drink alcohol if you are taking 14B (Butanediol) or GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) aka 'Fantasy' and 'liquid Ecstasy' as it can lead to nausea, breathing problems, and possible death
- Check with your doctor about drinking if you have medical conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy or asthma or if you are on medication.

#### 14. Organise transport before going out. Do not drive

- If you're going out and plan to drink alcohol leave your car keys at home. Taking your keys can lead to the poor decision to drive
- If you are out and have your car with you, keep your drinking to a minimum if at all. If you do end up over the limit get a lift with a sober friend or get a taxi home.

##### **Don't drive**

- If you are planning to walk or use public transport it is better to travel with a friend for added safety
- If you are drinking at home pre-plan the quantity of alcohol you need for the night to avoid driving intoxicated to the liquor store
- If you've been drinking you need to wait at least one hour for every standard drink before driving again. E.g. if you've had 6 standard drinks you need to wait at least 6 hours before driving to ensure there is no alcohol in your system.

#### 15. To prevent spiking, don't leave your drinks unattended

- While it has been known for people's drinks to be spiked with sedating drugs, the drug most commonly used to spike drinks is alcohol. More alcohol can be added to drinks without arousing suspicion; if someone else goes to the bar or is hosting they could add double or triple shots of spirits without the drinker realizing they are consuming so much. A person who spikes a drink may be someone you know, an acquaintance, or a stranger.



#### 16. Avoid alcohol while pregnant

- There is **no known safe level** of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Every time a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol passes from her bloodstream through the placenta to the unborn baby. The mother's alcohol level is the same for the unborn baby. Alcohol is also absorbed into the fluid surrounding the unborn baby (amniotic fluid) and this fluid is swallowed by the unborn baby
- Alcohol is a toxic substance that can cause birth defects in an unborn baby. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a range of development disorders and related birth defects resulting from alcohol use during pregnancy.

#### 17. Avoid drinking when caring for children

- They need you to respond effectively in emergencies.

#### 18. Avoid drinking alcohol when you feel bad

- Anger, depression, anxiety, exhaustion and boredom - these are the emotions that often lead people to drink and which are associated with relapse. It is much harder to control drinking when you are experiencing physical or psychological discomfort. Rather than drinking alcohol, look for other ways to manage these emotions (e.g. CADS Managing Mood group).

#### 19. Alcohol and asthma

- Alcoholic drinks can trigger a range of allergy-like symptoms including asthma. Wine is the most commonly reported trigger for allergic responses due mainly to histamines and additives like sulphites. When histamines are released into the bloodstream, sneezing, itching, headaches and flushing reactions can occur. Sulphites can trigger an asthma attack.
- If you have asthma and notice that it gets triggered by certain alcoholic drinks, avoid these drinks in the future.

#### 20. Be aware of the drinks you have without even noticing

- 'Automatic' drinks are the drinks you have without thinking; the more automatic drinks you have the less likely you are to stay within the recommended standard drinks guidelines.

## 21. Try a period of being alcohol-free

- How long you do this for is up to you. Some people try for 30-days alcohol-free, some 90 days or more. Although you can do this at any time you might find it helpful to do it with others during Dry July or FebFast. For more information check out <http://nz.dryjuly.com/> and <http://www.febfast.org.nz/>  
The other cool thing about these initiatives is that going without alcohol helps raise money for charities
- Stopping drinking for a while can help you become more aware of your drinking patterns and triggers
- Check out Mrs D is Going Without at <http://livingwithoutalcohol.blogspot.co.nz/> for inspiration and support.

## 22. Get support

- Change takes time. Having positive support can increase your ability to manage and reduce feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, shame and guilt. We know from experience and research that managing alcohol and other drug use is more successful with the support of friends and family
- Our CADS staff specialise in alcohol and other drugs. They can support your decision to change the way you drink. Call us on 09 815 1818 and get more info at <http://www.cads.org.nz/>

## Recommended Drinking Guidelines

Please note that these drinking guidelines DO NOT relate to driving. **After drinking these amounts you could easily be over the limit to drive safely.**

Figures vary in range depending on the percentage of the alcohol the person drinks.

A standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol.



### WOMEN

On any one DAY drink  
**no more than 2** standard drinks

In any week 2 alcohol free days  
and no more than 10 standard drinks



### MEN

On any one DAY drink  
**no more than 3** standard drinks

In any week 2 alcohol free days  
and no more than 15 standard drinks

Remember, there is no level of drinking that is safe for all people all the time and the Recommended Drinking Guidelines may be too high if you are:

- Driving/ operating machinery/ boating
- Taking medications including aspirin or any other drugs that irritate the stomach, such as steroids or anti-inflammatory drugs
- Suffering an acute or chronic physical disease such as heart and lung disease, influenza, diabetes, epilepsy or acute infections
- Recovering from an accident, injury or operation.

Health, age, and weight directly affect how much it is safe for you to drink. For some, no alcohol is the only safe option, for example, if you are pregnant. Research