

Practical information

How to apply the Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol

This section helps to put the guidelines into action and includes links to further information. The information is based on the expertise of the NHMRC's Expert Committee. It has not gone through the evaluation process applied to the guidelines themselves.

Guideline 1: Adults

To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.

The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.

This guideline aims to reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm, injury, illness or death for healthy adult men and women. It is not a recommendation for minimum consumption. If you are a non-drinker, the guideline does not suggest that you can benefit from drinking alcohol.

How to reduce my risk of harm from drinking

There are several strategies you can use. For example:

- eat food before and while drinking alcohol
- for every drink of alcohol, have one non-alcoholic drink
- check the label on your drink to see how many standard drinks it contains
- keep in mind drinks served in pubs, bars and restaurants are often served in larger glasses and can contain more than one standard drink
- set limits for yourself and stick to them
- if you are thirsty, drink water before alcohol
- avoid using alcohol to deal with stress, anxiety or poor sleep. Although it may give short-term relief, drinking alcohol to deal with these problems may make them worse
- develop a range of alternative approaches to deal with stress and anxiety. Consult with your GP or other health professional for some possible solutions.

When should I drink less?

There are some situations in which even small amounts of alcohol increase risk. These include:

- driving a vehicle
- riding a motorbike or bicycle
- using machinery or other activities that need concentration
- boating, fishing, swimming or other activities on and around the water
- supervising children or when you are responsible for the safety of others
- using certain medicines or drugs.

Risks associated with these activities increase when alcohol is added and continue to increase with every drink.

How can I manage safety among friends and family?

If you meet with friends or family in situations where drinking alcohol is likely, you can reduce the risk for the whole group by, for example:

- deciding on a nominated driver or agreeing to travel by public transport
- ensuring children are under safe supervision by a non-drinking adult
- being aware of potential risks in the environment, such as nearby roads or bodies of water
- looking out for the safety of others.

When do the effects of alcohol end?

Time is the only antidote to alcohol. The average healthy adult needs at least one hour — and often longer — to process the alcohol in a single standard drink.

Activities such as showering, exercise, or drinking coffee after consuming alcohol do not speed up its removal from the body.

What if it's too hard to limit my intake?

Some people find it hard to limit their drinking. Once they start, it is difficult to stop.

For people in this situation, there are professional and community-based approaches that can provide support and help. Options include making an appointment with your GP, and learning more about effects of alcohol by reading the expert advice presented on the Australian Government Department of Health website: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol>

Where can I get help?

The Australian Government Department of Health recommends the services of a number of research and community organisations, such as:

- Alcohol and Drug Foundation: 1300 858 584 or visit: www.adf.org.au
- Alcohol. Think Again: 1800 198 024 or visit: www.alcoholthinkagain.com.au
- Alcoholics Anonymous: 1300 222 222 or visit: www.aa.org.au

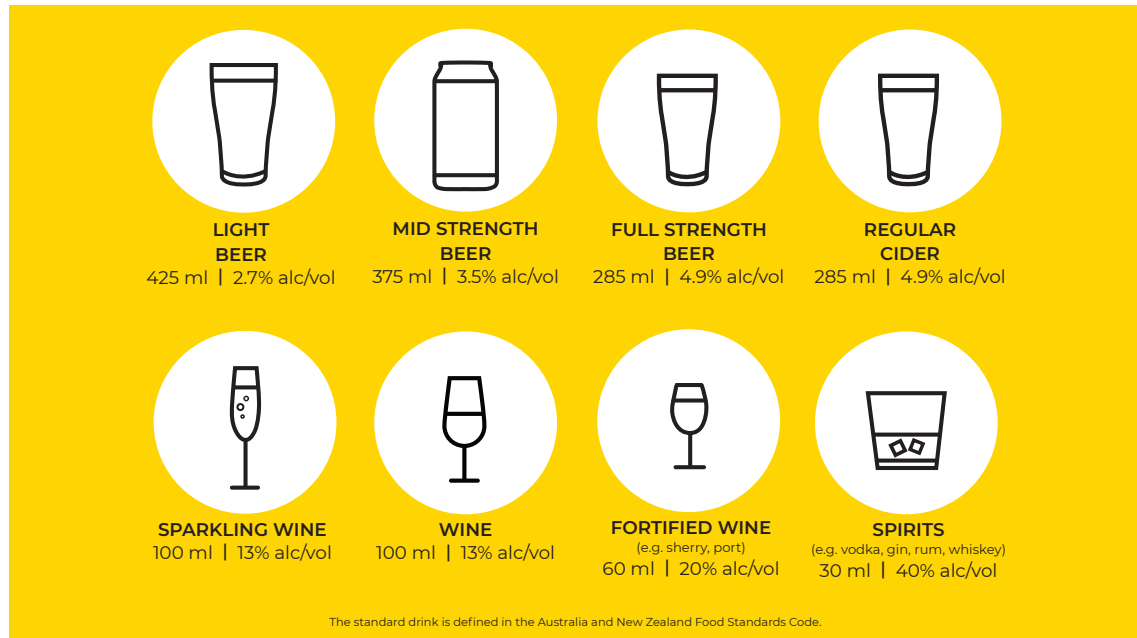
For a full list of organisations, visit: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-contacts>

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What is a standard drink?

A standard drink is 10 grams of pure alcohol. The type of alcohol makes no difference, 10 grams of alcohol is 10 grams of alcohol, whether it is in beer, wine or spirits. It does not matter whether it is mixed with soft drink, fruit juice, water or ice.



Guideline 2: Children and people under 18 years of age

To reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol.

Why not drinking is important for young people

Human brains continue to develop until around the age of 25 years and are particularly sensitive to alcohol. Drinking is a contributor to the leading causes of death among adolescents, including road accidents, injuries and suicides. It also contributes to risk-taking. For these reasons, children and adolescents should not drink.

Parental supply of alcohol

There is evidence that early drinking increases the risk of behaviour and health problems in later life. There is no evidence that giving children or teenagers alcohol under parental supervision helps protect them against risky drinking.

How can I reduce the chances of my children drinking alcohol?

- Work on good, open communication. Talk to your child or adolescent about alcohol; listen as well as share information. Explain the risks and harms from drinking alcohol.
- Spend regular one-on-one time with them, doing activities you both enjoy.
- Help them feel they belong in their family, school or sporting club.
- Help them feel good about themselves. Praise their efforts or achievements. Make them feel respected and loved.
- Be aware of the influence of friends and peers. Talk with your teenager about pressure they may experience, and how to respond.
- Encourage positive friendships. Maintain communication with other parents — if you have a united approach to alcohol, it can make life easier.
- For detailed expert advice, please visit www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-throughout-life/alcohol-and-young-people#how-to-reduce-your-risk

How can I be a role model?

- If you drink, do so within the guidelines.
- Don't drink every time you see friends, celebrate or relax.
- Find ways to cope with stress that do not involve alcohol.

Parties

- Contact the host to check that a parent will be there. Ask if alcohol will be present and, if so, how they will ensure children don't access it.
- Encourage your adolescent to call you if or when they want to leave.
- Consider providing travel cards and phone credit as lower risk alternatives to cash.

Where can I get help?

More information about alcohol and young people can be found on the Australian Government Health Department website: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-throughout-life/alcohol-and-young-people>

The Department of Health website also offers advice for parents and children: www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-contacts

A wide range of articles, apps and videos on issues around alcohol, children and young people can also be found at: <https://raisingchildren.net.au/>

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Guideline 3: Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding

A. To prevent harm from alcohol to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol.

B. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby.

Pregnancy

- No safe level of drinking during pregnancy has been identified.
- The risk of harm to a developing baby increases the more, and the more frequently, the mother drinks. The risk reduces the earlier the mother ceases drinking.
- If a woman drinks alcohol before she finds out she is pregnant, it does not automatically mean the baby will be harmed.
- Women who stop drinking when they find out they are pregnant reduce the risk of harm to the developing baby.
- If you are a heavy drinker, seek medical support to stop safely. Withdrawal syndromes are bad for developing babies.
- Partners of pregnant women play an important role, supporting the decision not to drink.
- Talk to your GP or women's health professional.

For more advice on alcohol and pregnancy, please visit the Alcohol and Drug Foundation: <https://adf.org.au/insights/alcohol-and-pregnancy/>

Breastfeeding

For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their babies.

- If a mother drinks when she is breastfeeding, the alcohol crosses into the breastmilk.
- If a mother breastfeeds her baby while there is still alcohol in her breastmilk, the baby also drinks the alcohol.
- When a mother drinks alcohol while breastfeeding, the baby can have problems feeding and sleeping.
- A baby's brain keeps developing after it is born. This means an infant's brain is more sensitive to damage from alcohol than an adult brain.

But what if I decide to drink alcohol?

- Not drinking is always the best option for you and your baby, but if you do decide to drink, you can reduce the risk to your child by planning ahead.
- Breastmilk expressed and stored before you have a drink will not contain alcohol. This can be used to feed the baby afterwards.
- Only time removes alcohol from breastmilk, and it takes at least an hour for a healthy adult body to process one standard drink. Breastmilk won't be free of alcohol until the level in the mother's bloodstream returns to zero. If a woman drinks several drinks, she will not be able to safely breastfeed for multiple hours. "Pump and dump" does not do the trick!

Where can I get help?

Seek professional advice if you have questions about this information.

More information about alcohol, pregnancy and breastfeeding can be found on the Australian Government Health Department website: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/alcohol-throughout-life/alcohol-during-pregnancy-and-breastfeeding>

Download the free [Feed Safe](#) app to help know when breastmilk should be free of alcohol. Created by the Australian Breastfeeding Association, Reach Health Promotion Innovations and Curtin University, it is available for Apple and Android devices.

[Call a breastfeeding counsellor](#) on the Australian Breastfeeding Association Helpline, available 24/7, 1800 686 268.

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