



to reduce your risk of heart  
and circulatory diseases



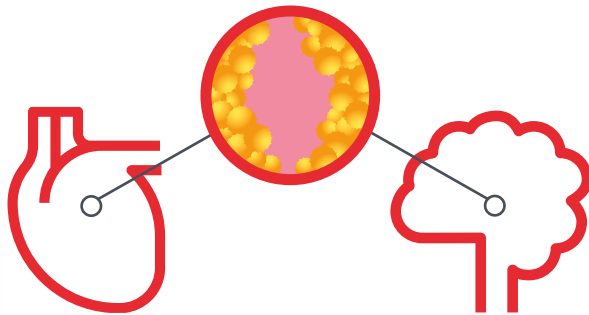
## Alcohol and heart and circulatory diseases

**Drinking too much alcohol puts you at risk of developing heart and circulatory diseases. Here you'll find out steps you can take to start lowering that risk.**

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your risk of having a heart attack, stroke, developing vascular dementia and Type 2 diabetes, so it's important to keep within the recommended alcohol guidelines.

Not drinking alcohol will always be the healthiest choice. However, cutting down on how much you drink, rather than giving up alcohol completely, is still an important step for protecting your heart and overall health.

Over time, drinking too much alcohol raises your blood pressure. High blood pressure makes your arteries (the blood vessels that carry blood to your organs) less stretchy and damages the walls. This makes it easier for fatty material to build up, and limits the flow of blood and oxygen, which can lead to a heart attack or stroke.



Artery in the heart getting blocked

Artery in the brain getting blocked

## How much is too much?

**Men and women should not drink more than 14 units of alcohol each week. Try to have alcohol-free days each week.**

Drinking up to 14 units a week is considered 'low-risk'. Drinking more than this over time can lead to serious health conditions, including:

- some cancers
- liver disease
- stroke
- brain damage
- heart disease
- damage to the nervous system

14 units =



6 pints of  
4% beer



6 glasses  
(175ml) of  
13% wine

# Binge drinking

**Binge drinking is when you drink a large amount in a short space of time. Saving your weekly units for a big night isn't any better for your health. Even if you don't binge drink often, it will have an effect on your heart.**

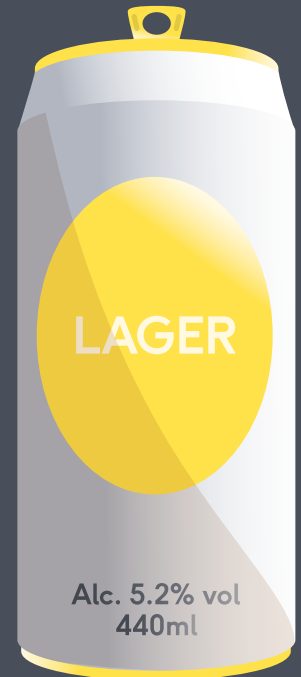
For men and women in the UK, a drinking session usually counts as a binge if you have more than 6 units in one session – that's two large (250ml) glasses of wine.

**Good to know: Different people react to alcohol in different ways. So don't measure your alcohol intake by how it makes you feel. It's easy to reach your limit without feeling drunk.**

# Keeping track

**The size and strength of a drink will determine how many units it has. A unit's a way of measuring the amount of alcohol you're drinking.**

You'll also see things like %ABV on alcohol labels. This tells you how strong the drink is. The higher the %ABV is, the less you should have. It might be an idea to know how many units are in your favourite drinks so you can keep track easily.



# Keeping track of your units

Here are how many units there are in some common drinks:



Large glass of wine  
250ml (12%)

**3 units**



Pint of lager / beer /  
cider (5.2%)

**3 units**



Bottle of lager/beer/  
cider 330ml (5%)

**1.7 units**



Single small shot of  
spirits 25ml (40%)

**1 unit**

# Hidden calories in alcohol

Drinking too much alcohol can make you gain weight. Being overweight increases your chances of developing heart and circulatory diseases.

**170  
kcal**



1 double vodka  
and tonic

or



1 large slice of  
Victoria sponge

**195  
kcal**



1 glass of wine  
(250ml)

or



1 chocolate  
brownie

Alcoholic drinks are high in calories. The calories in these drinks can quickly add up, leading to weight gain.

227  
kcal



1 pint of beer

or



1 large doughnut

280  
kcal

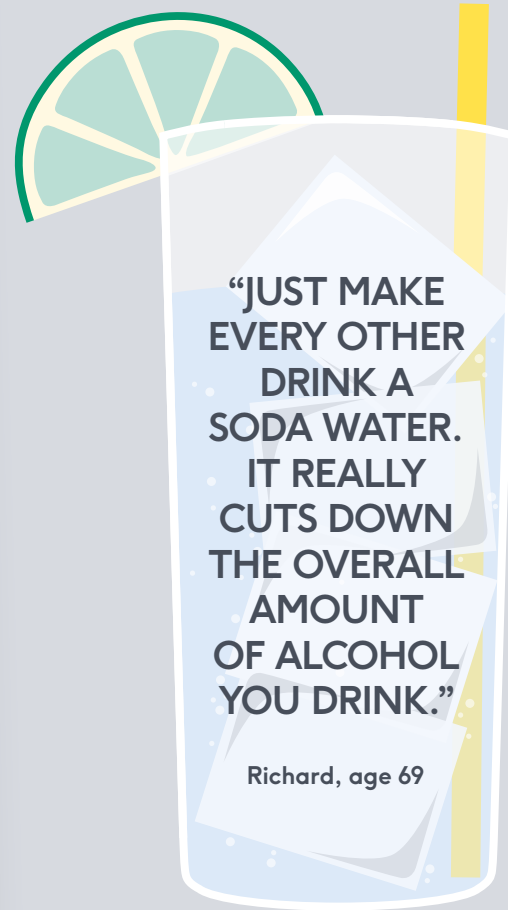


1 pina colada

or



1 blueberry muffin



**“JUST MAKE EVERY OTHER DRINK A SODA WATER. IT REALLY CUTS DOWN THE OVERALL AMOUNT OF ALCOHOL YOU DRINK.”**

Richard, age 69

# Small changes add up

Making lots of small changes over time can help to reduce weight gain. Look for lower calorie options of your favourite drinks – especially the mixers. Diet fizzy drinks, slimline tonic and soda water are all good options.

Avoid energy drinks as they're packed with sugar and other unhealthy additives. And when it comes to wines and ciders, ask for 'dry' instead of 'sweet'.

If you're switching from alcohol to soft drinks, make sure they're sugar-free soft drinks. When in doubt, water is always your best bet – sparkling and still both have no calories.

Because alcohol clouds your judgement, it can also lead to other unhealthy choices, like eating unhealthy food or being physically inactive. Stick to your limits to keep yourself on track.

# Simple swaps

Simple swaps you can make to reduce your alcohol and calorie intake:

## Mixers



Choose soda, low calorie or diet options of soft drinks

## Wine



Choose a small glass instead of a large one

## Beer



Choose a bottle instead of a pint

# Get into good habits

Try these tips to help take control of how much alcohol you drink.

- Have a glass of water between each alcoholic drink. It will slow you down and keep you hydrated.
- Read the label to see how strong the drink is and consider having fewer or choosing differently.
- Set yourself a drink limit at the start of the night so you don't get carried away or lose count.
- Explain to the people around you that you're trying to cut back and need their support.
- If you feel pressured to drink, buy your own drinks instead of doing rounds. You could also say that you're driving, you can't drink with your medication, or just have some sparkling water and lime and let people assume it's an alcoholic drink.



**Top tip: Go for smaller drinks. Ask for single shots, small glasses and halves or bottles instead of pints.**

# Drinking and stress

Many people turn to alcohol to manage feelings like tiredness, stress and even boredom, or when they've had a bad day. If you think any of these reasons are making you drink more than is good for you, it's a good idea to take some steps to cut down.

Drinking plenty of water, eating a balanced diet, being physically active and getting enough sleep all help you feel more energetic, and less stressed. Next time you feel like turning to alcohol to deal with stressful feelings, try one of these activities instead:



Go for a  
30 minute  
walk



Take up an  
active hobby  
or exercise



Meet up  
with friends  
for a cuppa

# Alcohol and medication

**Alcohol can affect the way your medication works. Always check with your doctor or pharmacist that it's safe to drink if you take regular medication.**

Everyone should avoid drinking too much alcohol but this is particularly important if you're taking medication, including:

- **Painkillers and sleeping tablets** – If you're taking sleeping tablets or painkillers, remember that alcohol will have a powerful effect and make you more drowsy.
- **Warfarin and other anticoagulant (anti-clotting) medication** – Alcohol can make your medication less effective, making your blood thinner than it should be. So if you do drink alcohol, it's better to have just a small amount, and not too often. Check with your doctor or specialist nurse if you can drink any alcohol.



# When to see your doctor

**If you're worried about how much alcohol you drink it's important to speak to someone about it.**

Even if it makes you feel better in the short-term, too much alcohol will eventually damage your mental and physical health.

If you would struggle to go a day without drinking, you need to book an appointment with your GP.

Make sure you tell them if:

- You have memory loss, embarrassment or injury from drinking.
- You crave alcohol and are preoccupied with thoughts of it.
- People close to you are worried about how much you drink.

You may also have a local alcohol support service you can go to or you can find support online.

Heart transplants. Clot busting drugs. Pacemakers. Breakthroughs born from visionary medical research. Research you fund with your donations.

Heart and circulatory diseases kill 1 in 4 people in the UK. They cause heartbreak on every street. But if research can invent machines to restart hearts, fix arteries in newborn babies, build tiny devices to correct heartbeats, and give someone a heart they weren't born with – imagine what's next.

We fund research into all heart and circulatory diseases and their risk factors. Heart attacks, heart failure, stroke, vascular dementia, diabetes and many more. All connected, all under our microscope. Our research is the promise of future prevention, cures and treatments.

The promise to protect the people we love. Our children. Our parents. Our brothers. Our sisters. Our grandparents. Our closest friends.

You and the British Heart Foundation. Together, we will beat heartbreak forever.

**Beat heartbreak forever.**