

How Much Alcohol is Too Much for You?

Alcohol

How much alcohol is too much for you? The information below can help you decide if you have a drinking problem.

Most adults limit how much alcohol they drink. Anyone who drinks any alcohol, though, has some level of risk for drinking too much.

Guidelines from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism define moderate (low-risk) drinking and at-risk drinking levels, as shown below. *These are guidelines only.* Circumstances in your life may change what is a safe level of alcohol for you.

No amount of alcohol is safe if you:

- are pregnant or thinking about becoming pregnant
- take medicine that interacts with alcohol
- have a health problem that gets worse with alcohol such as ulcers or liver disease
- are dependent on alcohol
- have a mental health condition.

You may have other circumstances that affect your use of alcohol. Your health care provider can give you more information.

A Standard Drink

One drink contains 12 grams (.5 ounce) of pure alcohol. Examples of standard drinks include:

- 12 ounces of beer or wine cooler
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.

Being at Risk for a Drinking Problem

You are at risk for developing a drinking problem if you:

- have a family history of addiction
- use alcohol to self-medicate or cope with stress or physical and mental problems.

Signs That You Have a Drinking Problem

Alcohol-related health problems or behavioral problems may be a sign that you have a problem with alcohol use.

- Too much alcohol can affect your health, causing:
 - blackouts
 - ongoing abdominal pain
 - high blood pressure
 - sleep disorders
 - depression
 - liver problems
 - sexual function problems.

- Alcohol can affect your behavior and cause:
 - family problems
 - poor performance at work or school
 - accidents
 - injuries.

Signs That You are Dependent on Alcohol

You may be dependent on alcohol if you:

- think about drinking often or have a strong urge to drink
- cannot stop drinking once you start
- drink to prevent withdrawal symptoms that develop when you do not drink: shaking (tremors), upset stomach (nausea), sweating or mood swings
- have to drink more than you used to in order to feel the effects of alcohol
- change plans so you can drink
- drink in the morning to “steady your nerves.”

Resources for Help With Alcohol Use

- your health care provider (for counseling, treatment or referral)
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 1-800-662-4357 (to learn about local treatment programs or to talk with someone about drinking problems)
- Alcoholics Anonymous, a support group (call the local chapter listed in the phone book under “alcoholism”)

Your health care provider may have information about other local resources you can contact.

Information adapted from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.