



connect
wellbeing, ability, recovery

ALCOHOL AND MEN

Facts and figures, and a breakdown of the male health problems and health conditions associated with regularly drinking too much.

- Four in 10 men drink more than daily unit guidelines
- Why men can hold their drink better than women
- Can alcohol affect your fertility and sexual performance?
- How alcohol affects your appearance
- Can alcohol cause gout?
- Facts
- Staying in control

The media loves a story about young women and their binge drinking. But drinking to excess is a big issue for British men too – they're twice as likely as women to abuse or become dependent on alcohol. If you're a man who regularly drinks above the weekly unit guidelines (14 units a week spaced out over the week with 2 alcohol free days) you risk a whole host of health issues – from low energy and sexual difficulties in the short term, to heart disease and cancer in the long term. You're also twice as likely to develop liver cirrhosis and have nearly twice the chance (1.8 times) of being diagnosed with high blood pressure. And it's not just older men who have to worry about alcohol's effect on their health. A quarter (26.6%) of deaths of men aged 16 to 24 can be attributed to alcohol.

Around four in 10 men drink more than the daily unit guidelines

According to government guidance, men should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week (spaced out over the week with 2 alcohol free days). 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week. Yet, over a third of men (35%) surveyed by the NHS in 2010 had drunk more than four units on one day in the past week. One fifth (19%) drunk twice the maximum daily unit guidelines. The definition of binge drinking for men is consuming eight or more units in a single session. 6% of men in the UK are "at risk" drinkers – someone who drinks more than 51 units a week.

Men can hold their drink better than women

Equality and alcohol simply don't mix. Men's bodies, in general, process alcohol better than women's and it's good to be aware of this if you're drinking in a mixed group of friends. It comes down to simple biology: the average woman weighs less than the average man and so has less tissue to absorb alcohol. Women also have a proportionally higher ratio of fat to water than men. This means they're less able to dilute alcohol within the body. So when they drink the same amount of alcohol, women will end up with a higher concentration of alcohol in their blood than men. For both men and women, regular drinking can lead to your body building up a tolerance to alcohol. You have to drink more to get the same effects, which can mean you end up drinking to levels that are harmful to your short- and long-term health. This is one of the main reasons it's important to take regular breaks from alcohol. It can have the effect of 'resetting' your tolerance, so it becomes easier to cut back.



Alcohol can mess with your appearance

You'd probably think twice about eating a hot dog, followed by a burger, with a doughnut for dessert. But drinking four pints of strong lager might not cause you such concern. In fact, you'd be consuming about the same amount of calories in each situation – around 1,000. Alcohol is seriously fattening. But it isn't just the calories in the drink that makes you gain weight. Alcohol reduces the amount of fat your body burns for energy. Because we can't store alcohol in the body, our systems want to get rid of it as quickly as possible, and this process takes priority over absorbing nutrients and burning fat.

Excessive long-term drinking can also cause things to happen to men's bodies. They include:

- withering of the testicles
- enlargement of the breasts
- loss of hair on the body
- Heavy drinking can also worsen skin disorders like rosacea which causes the blood

vessels in the face to expand, making your face permanently redder. It can also cause inflamed red bumps and pus spots.

Alcohol can cause gout – and a whole host of long-term health issues

Heavy drinking can, of course, have more serious consequences than wobbly pecs. It can also cause gout, an arthritic condition that causes inflammation, swelling and pain in your joints which is most common in men aged 30 to 60.

In the long term, drinking to excess can have many adverse effects on your health, including increasing your chances of:

- liver damage
- heart disease
- cancer
- bone disease
- your pancreas becoming inflamed
- your stomach becoming irritated
- type 2 diabetes
- anxiety and depression
- Men are twice as likely as women to abuse or become dependent on alcohol
- A quarter of deaths of men under 34 can be attributed to alcohol
- 6% of men in the UK are “at risk” drinkers – someone who drinks more than 51 units a week



Staying in control

Here are three ways you can cut back and keep your drinking under control:

1. Keep track of what you're drinking. Your liver can't tell you if you're drinking too much, but the [MyDrinkaware drinks calculator](#) can. It can even help you cut down.
2. Know your strength. Alcoholic drinks labels will have the abbreviation "ABV" which stands for Alcohol By Volume, or sometimes just the word "vol". It shows the percentage of your drink that's pure alcohol. This can vary a lot. For example, some ales are 3.5%, some stronger lagers can be as much as 6% ABV. This means that just one pint of strong lager can be more than three units of alcohol, so you need to keep your eye on what you're drinking.
3. Size matters. It's easy to cut down by switching pints for halves or bottles of beer and choosing a smaller glass for your wine. Opting for spritzers or shandies will also help reduce the number of units you're drinking.

Further information

Your GP can help you figure out if you should make any changes in your drinking, and offer help and advice along the way. If you're concerned about someone's drinking, or your own, Drinkline runs a free, confidential helpline. Call 0800 917 8282.

For more information about men's health, visit the website run by the Men's Health Forum, an organisation working to improve men's health and wellbeing.





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