



connect
wellbeing, ability, recovery

ALCOHOL AND ME

Like any other drug, alcohol use or misuse can have an impact on every aspect of our life, including our work, relationships, our physical health and mental wellbeing. Becoming better informed about the effects of alcohol can help make positive lifestyle choices.

Many of us enjoy a drink. In fact, over three-quarters of adults in Ireland drink alcohol and while some might refer to a “drinking culture”, in reality we all drink in different ways. For more on how the UK drink’s as a nation, visit <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/research/research-and-evaluation-reports/alcohol-consumption-uk>

And in Ireland: <https://alcoholireland.ie/facts/how-much-do-we-drink/>

Thinking about our relationship with alcohol is a start to understanding how it can affect us. Here are just a few questions we might ask ourselves:

How often have you gone to work with a hangover?

It’s estimated that excessive drinking has cost the NI economy nearly £50m in lost working days and €41 million in Ireland. The effects however can also be felt when we’re at work.

Presenteeism – going to work when we’re ill – costs the economy over £90 million per year.* But what can that mean for us as individuals? Negative effects, including tiredness and a lack of concentration can affect our performance and productivity – in turn, leading to further stress and anxiety.

For organisations – raising staff awareness on the potentially negative effects of alcohol can be a key factor in reducing its impact on the workplace.

*Drink, work & Me. Every Contact Counts – All Sources

For more on alcohol and the workplace, visit: <https://www.hseni.gov.uk/articles/drugs-and-alcohol-workplace>

Do you ever reach for a drink when feeling stressed?

It’s normal to want to relax after a challenging day, however, opting for an alcohol drink to try and relieve tension or mask anxiety may ultimately make things worse. Alcohol is a depressant – while it can initially lift mood, once it starts to wear off you may start to feel agitated in the short- term and in the long-term it may increase the likelihood of experiencing mental health issues such as depression.

Anxiety and depression are more common in heavy drinkers – heaving drinking is more common in those with anxiety and depression.



For more on alcohol and mental health, visit:

<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/fact-sheets/alcohol-and-mental-health>
<https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/health/mental-health-and-alcohol/>

Do you often have 6 or more drinks in one occasion?

For many, a hangover or being ill are two of the short-term effects of excessive drinking, but how often do we consider the wider impact on our long-term health? In Ireland, the HSE low-risk guidelines recommend up to 17 standard drinks spread out over one week for men and up to 11 for women. In NI, it's recommended that we drink no more than 14 units per week and to spread our units evenly over three days or more. Drinking above the guidelines risks a number of long-term health issues, including heart disease, high blood pressure and damage to vital organs such as the liver.

For more on the health effects of alcohol, visit:

<https://www.drinkaware.ie/facts/what-are-the-low-risk-weekly-guidelines>

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/alcohol-facts/health-effects-of-alcohol/>

Do you have a tendency to argue more often with people when you drink?

Alcohol can lower our mood and our inhibitions, with psychological effects that can affect our judgement and influence social interactions. It's no surprise then that when under the influence we may say or do things that if left unresolved may grow into something more. Drinking heavily may also more broadly affect our relationships with our partner, family and friends.

In understanding our relationship with alcohol a little better, what can we do to help reduce its impact?

Here are just a few ideas:

TAKE THE TEST

The PHA have introduced a quick and easy way to find out if you are drinking in a way that may be harmful to your health. The alcohol test is an interactive 'MOT' where you can check how many units you drink and its possible impact. Visit the link here:

<http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/mot>

Or try askaboutalcohol.ie and visit:

<https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/your-drinking/drinks-calculator/>



KNOW YOUR UNITS

Know how much alcohol is in your drink of choice. For a standard ROI drink guide, visit: <https://www.drinkaware.ie/facts/what-is-a-standard-drink>

Or in NI, visit <https://drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol-units/> or download the Know Your Units app, available on Android and Apple Devices.

TRY ALTERNATIVES

Try alternative ways to deal with stress. Instead of reaching for a beer or glass of wine after a hard day, go for a run, swim or to a yoga class, or talk to a friend about what's worrying you. Give alcohol-free days a try. If you drink regularly, your body starts to build up tolerance to alcohol. This is one of the main reasons why it's important to consider taking regular breaks from drinking. Test out have a break for yourself and see what positive results you notice.

REDUCE THE HARM

When we are drinking, there are a number of easy steps that we can take to reduce the impact of alcohol in the short-term. Here are a few:

- Have something to eat before you start drinking
- Avoid drinking in rounds
- Try drinking water in between drinks
- Know what your limits are and stick to them
- Plan how you are getting home
- Keep track of how much you're drinking throughout the evening
- Be aware of how certain drinks affect you
- Have a few drink-free days each week

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking, for more information:

- **Contact your GP**
- **In NI, contact Addiction NI on 028 90664434**

Or visit:

<http://www.drugs.ie/phone>

<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

<https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/>

<https://www.drinkaware.ie/>

<https://alcoholireland.ie/>

<https://alcoholchange.org.uk/>





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