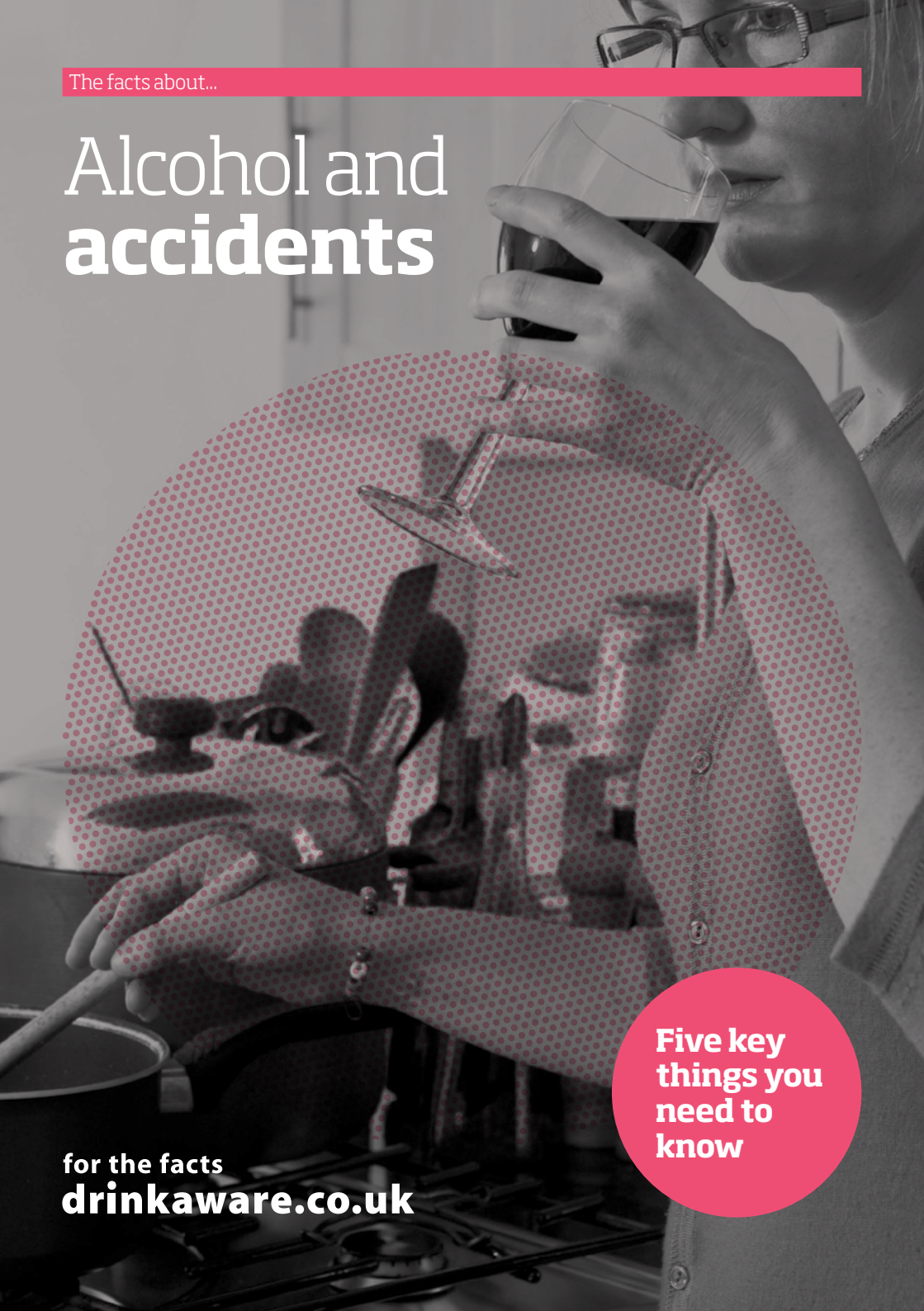
The facts about...

Alcohol and **accidents**



Five key things you need to know

for the facts
drinkaware.co.uk

Spilling red wine over your friend's pristine white sofa. Breaking another wine glass all over the floor. Tripping up your front steps.

Drinking can make us prone to minor accidents that almost seem part of your average night. But alcohol can be the cause of more serious accidents too.

There are two main things which make this likely. Because it's a depressant, alcohol slows down the brain and affects the body's responses. At the same time, if you've been drinking, you're more likely to take risks. Combined, these reactions increase the chance of accidents happening.

Read on to understand more and find out what you can do to stay safe.

1

The more you drink, the more likely you are to have an accident

Whether dancing on tabletops or hopping over fences when you've forgotten your house keys, alcohol can make you do things you wouldn't dream of doing sober.

But the feeling you get when the amount of alcohol in your blood increases can have disastrous consequences. It can make you overestimate your own abilities and behave recklessly. That road doesn't look as busy, that gap isn't so big and besides, you are an expert long jumper...

As blood alcohol concentration (BAC) rises, so does the risk of accidents. BAC, the amount of alcohol in your breath or blood, is measured in mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, or mg%. It's affected by all sorts of factors, including how much alcohol you drink, how fast you drink it, your body size, how much you've eaten, your gender and even your emotional health.

Younger people are more likely to have an alcohol-related accident than older people.[1]

[1] North West Public Health Observatory website, Alcohol-attributable mortality and hospital admissions (PDF). Available at http://www.nwph.net/nwpho/publications/alcoholattributablefractions.pdf

2

Alcohol affects your body's responses

Alcohol slows down your brain which means you are more likely to have an accident.

Drinking alcohol can:

- **affect our judgement and reasoning**
- **slow down our reactions**
- **upset our sense of balance and coordination**
- **impair our vision and hearing**
- **make us lose concentration and feel drowsy**

Accident victims who have been drinking suffer more serious injuries than those who haven't.[2]

3

More young men die from drink driving than any other group of people

Accidents involving drink driving have decreased hugely over the last 30 years. Deaths and serious injuries related to drink driving have fallen by more than three-quarters since 1980.[3]

That's the good news.

The bad news is that traffic accidents are still a leading cause of alcohol-related deaths among young men aged 16 to 24. In 2010, nearly 10,000 reported road casualties happened when a driver was over the legal alcohol limit representing 5% of all road casualties.[4]

For drivers, alcohol can:

- **reduce your ability to see distant objects**
- **reduce your night vision by 25%**[5]
- **make you have blurred and double vision**
- **reduce your ability to perceive what is happening around you**
- **make you lose your peripheral vision**

In the UK, the alcohol limit for drivers is 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood, 35mg per 100ml of breath or 107mg per 100ml of urine.[6]

250 people died because of drink driving accidents in 2010 – 14% of the total number of people who died because of road traffic accidents.[7]

[2] Waller, PF. 2003 'Alcohol effects on Motor Vehicle Crash Injury' Alcoholism, clinical and experimental research vol. 27, no. 4, pp 695-703.

[3] Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: 2010 Annual Report. Drinking and Driving. Department of transport. http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/road-accidents-and-safety-annual-report-2010/rrcgb2010-03.pdf

[4] ibid

[5] Cheshire Constabulary website, Alcohol. Available at http://www.cheshire.police.uk/advice--information/alcohol.aspx

[6] www.legislation.gov.uk website, Road Traffic Act 1988 S1, (11) (2 a-c). Available at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/52/contents

[7] Department for Transport website, Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain: 2010 Annual Report (PDF). Available at http://assets.dft.gov.uk/statistics/releases/road-accidents-and-safety-annual-report-2010/rrcgb2010-03.pdf

4

Alcohol increases the risk of accidents at home and work, and of accidents involving fires and drownings

Accidents at home
Alcohol is the single biggest cause of accidents at home. Of the 4,000 fatal accidents that happen in homes in the UK every year, 1 in 10 are alcohol-related.[8]

Accidents at work
Alcohol is a factor in up to one in four workplace accidents.

Fires
Around one in three fires are caused by people under the influence of alcohol. And two-thirds of people who are admitted to hospital or die from burns have been drinking.[9]

Drownings
Between a quarter and half of all adult drowning victims have alcohol in their bloodstream.[10]

Four top first aid tips to deal with alcohol-related accidents

If you are at the scene of an accident, call the emergency services as soon as possible. Once you've called for help, if the injured person is unconscious, make sure their airway is open. If they are sick and their throat becomes blocked with vomit or by their own tongue, they could choke and stop breathing.

If the person is breathing, place them in the recovery position. If they aren't breathing, perform chest compressions and breathe into their mouth.

If someone is bleeding, apply pressure to the wound using a clean cloth or piece of clothing. If they're in shock, lay them down, and raise and support the injured limb.

If someone is burned or scalded, cool the affected area in cold running water for at least 10 minutes. Then cover the wound with a clean, non-fluffy cloth to prevent infection.

[8] Institute of Alcohol Studies website, Alcohol and Accidents. Factsheets. http://www.ias.org.uk/resources/factsheets/accidents.pdf
[9] ibid
[10] ibid

5

The effects of alcohol can last longer than you think

Even after alcohol has left your bloodstream, you're more likely to have an accident. In one study, 14 hours after drinking, two-thirds of a group of pilots could not perform routine tasks in a simulator, despite the fact that all the alcohol had left their system.[11]

If you've had an accident when you've been drinking, other effects are:

- **Your recovery from injury may be hindered. This is because alcohol affects your circulation and immune system.**
- **It's harder for doctors to diagnose serious conditions such as head injuries when a patient is drunk.**
- **Alcohol can interfere with anaesthetic and other medication, meaning operations and treatment may be delayed.**

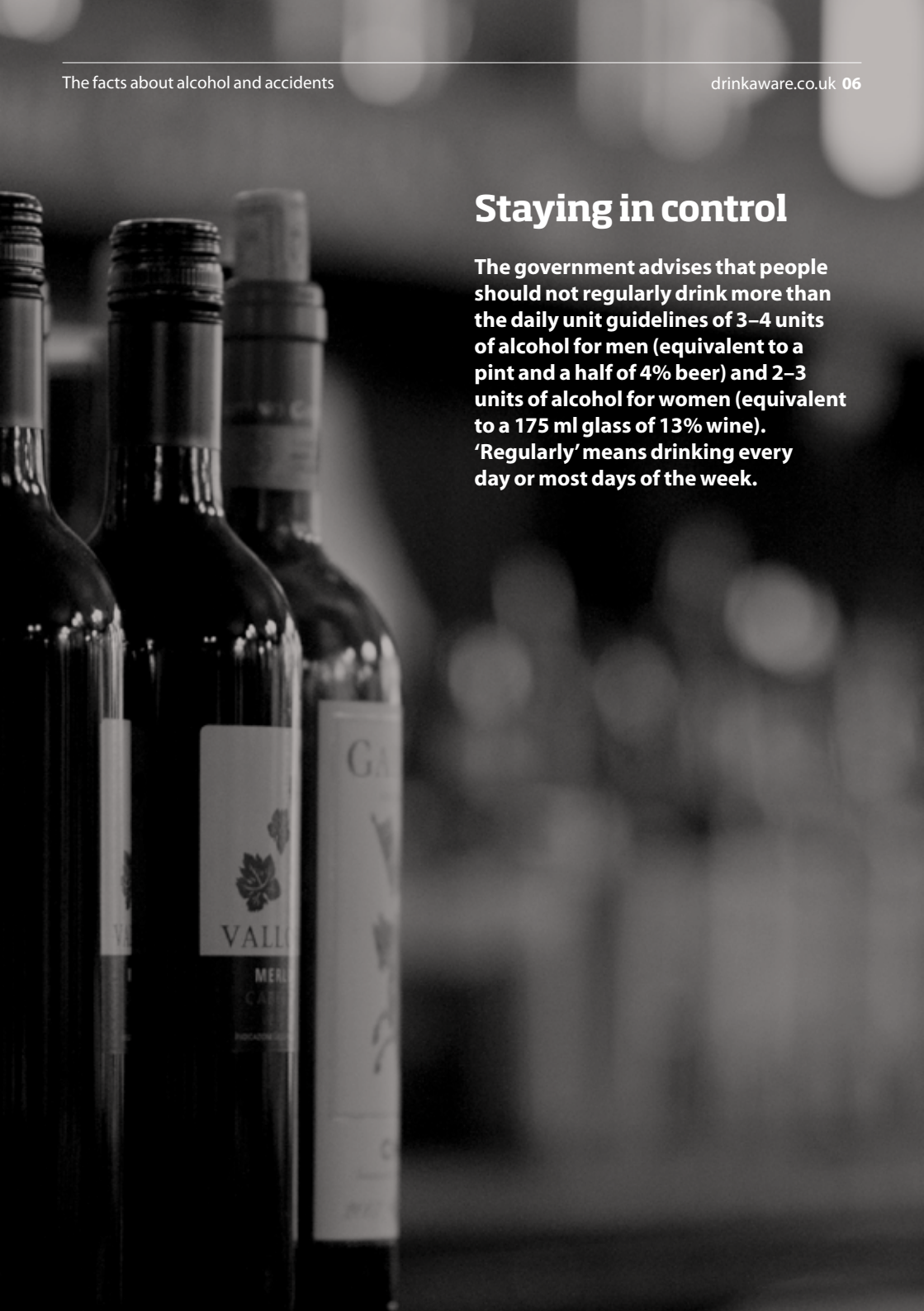
Three ways to avoid alcohol-related accidents

Don't drive, operate machinery, swim or take unnecessary risks.

Look out for friends who may be behaving recklessly.

Remember that your performance and judgement could still be affected by alcohol the day after a heavy drinking session.

[11] Modell, HG et al. 1990 'The problem of alcohol use by pilots' New England Journal of Medicine vol. 7, no. 323, pp. 455-61.



Staying in control

The government advises that people should not regularly drink more than the daily unit guidelines of 3–4 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer) and 2–3 units of alcohol for women (equivalent to a 175 ml glass of 13% wine). 'Regularly' means drinking every day or most days of the week.

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

A **Give alcohol-free days a go.**
Many medical experts recommend taking regular days off from drinking to ensure you don't become addicted to alcohol.

B **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.

C **Know what you're buying.**
Check out the ABV on a bottle of wine before you buy it. ABV stands for Alcohol by Volume, which is the percentage of the drink that is pure alcohol. Producers are increasingly introducing 10% or lower ABV wines that are as palatable as their stronger counterparts. Look out for them when you're next buying a bottle.

We've got the answers at
drinkaware.co.uk

Advice

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Other useful contacts

For the facts on alcohol and to keep track of your units through our MyDrinkaware tool, visit the Drinkaware website drinkaware.co.uk

Your GP can help you figure out if you should make any changes to your drinking, and offer help and advice.

If you're concerned about someone's drinking, or your own, Drinkline runs a free, confidential helpline. Call 0800 917 8282.

To find out about first aid courses in your area contact the St John Ambulance on 08700 10 49 50 or via their website www.sja.org.uk

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Drinkaware is an independent alcohol education charity

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