

The facts about...

Alcohol and **Men**

**Five key
things you
need to
know**

for the facts
drinkaware.co.uk

As a man, there is often pressure to prove your masculinity by drinking a lot and drinking fast. But drinking to excess is a big issue - men are twice as likely as women to abuse or become dependent on alcohol.¹

If you're a man who regularly drinks above the daily unit guidelines (three to four units a day) 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.²

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.³

1

Around a third of men drink more than the daily unit guidelines

According to government guidance, men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units of alcohol a day (equivalent to a pint and a half of 4% beer). "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. A fifth (19%) had drunk twice the daily unit guidelines. The definition of binge drinking for men is consuming eight or more units in a single session.⁴

6% of men in the UK are "at risk" drinkers – someone who drinks more than 51 units a week.⁵

¹ Schuckit, M. 'Alcohol-use disorders', *The Lancet*, Vol 373, Issue 9662, pp.492-501, 7 February 2009.

² NHS/Department of Health booklet 'Your drinking and you: The facts on alcohol, health harms and how to drink less' (2010). Available at <http://www.oxfordshiredaat.org/pdfs/Alcohol%20Effects%20Patient%20Leaflet.pdf>

³ Jones L, Bellis MA, Dedman D et al. 'Alcohol-attributable fractions for England: alcohol-attributable mortality and hospital admissions'. Centre for Public Health Research Directorate, Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool.

⁴ NHS information Centre for health and social care, Statistics on Alcohol: England, 2012. Available at http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/003_Health_Lifestyles/Alcohol_2012/Statistics_on_Alcohol_England_2012.pdf

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Jones L, Bellis MA, Dedman D et al. 'Alcohol-attributable fractions for England: alcohol-attributable mortality and hospital admissions'. Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University 2008.



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2

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.^{7,8}

For both men and women, regular drinking can mean your body builds 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.

Men are twice as likely as women to abuse or become dependent on alcohol.⁹



⁷ Frezza, M et al 1990, 'High blood alcohol levels in women: The role of decreased gastric alcohol dehydrogenase activity and first-pass metabolism', *New England Journal of Medicine*, vol 2, pp 95-99.

⁸ Taylor JL et al 1996, 'Alcohol elimination and simulator performance of male and female aviators: A preliminary report', *Aviation Space Environment Medicine*, vol 5, pp 407-413.

⁹ Schuckit, M. 'Alcohol-use disorders', *The Lancet*, Vol 373, Issue 9662, pp.492-501, 7 February 2009.

3

Alcohol can affect your fertility and sexual performance

In small amounts, alcohol may give you confidence and help you feel less inhibited. But it certainly won't help your performance in the bedroom. And it can reduce a couple's chances of conceiving. The good news is, if you reduce what you drink, its effect on your sex life can be quickly reversed:

Testosterone levels

Studies have shown that alcohol reduces testosterone levels. This can lead to loss of libido and reduce sperm quantity and quality.¹⁰

Sperm production and movement

As well as affecting hormone levels, alcohol is directly toxic to the testes. This can harm sperm production, stopping them developing properly and reducing their ability to move towards an egg. Alcohol may also affect the structure and movement of sperm by stopping the liver from properly metabolising vitamin A, which is needed for sperm to develop.¹¹

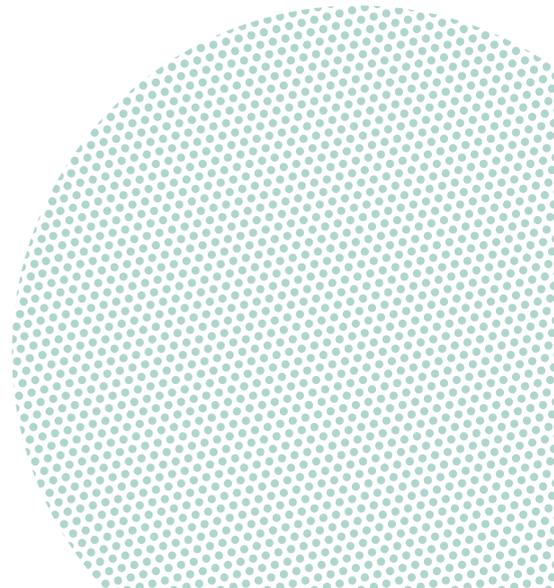
Impotence

Alcohol depresses the central nervous system which means it can make it difficult for some men to get, and keep, an erection (the infamous 'brewer's droop').¹²

¹⁰ Norwich Union Healthcare, Male Fertility Report 2005. Available at <http://www.norwichunion.com/media-centre/story/2186/gps-voiceconcern-for-next-generation-in-wake-of-d/>

¹¹ Leo, MA et al. 1982 'Hepatic vitamin A depletion in alcoholic liver injury' New England Journal of Medicine vol. 307, no. 10, pp. 597-601.

¹² NHS Choices website, Male sexual problems. Available at <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/goodsex/pages/malsexualdysfunction.aspx>



4

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 5% cider 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.¹³

Excessive long-term drinking can also cause some seriously unattractive things to happen to men's bodies.

They include:

- **withering of the testicles**
- **enlargement of the breasts or 'man boobs'**
- **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.



4 pints of cider contains around 1,000 calories

¹³ Charles S. Lieber, Charles S. (2000). 'ALCOHOL: Its Metabolism and Interaction With Nutrients' Annual Review of Nutrition vol. 20, pp. 395-420.

5

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 disease – which has no warning signs**
- **heart disease**
- **cancer**
- **bone disease**
- **your pancreas becoming inflamed**
- **your stomach becoming irritated**
- **type 2 diabetes**
- **anxiety and depression**



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 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. Visit drinkaware.co.uk

B Know your strength.

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.

C 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.

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 www.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.

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

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