

Alcohol Information

Alcohol is a drug which alters the drinker's mood – it may make you happy, confident, and relaxed and as it's a socially accepted "drug" – what can possibly be wrong with drinking it?

Many people can drink alcohol in a way that does not cause problems to themselves or others around them. However as well as the positive effects on your mood it can also make you aggressive, argumentative, inconsiderate, irrational and more likely to commit crime.

How Does It Affect My Health:

There has been conflicting and confusing media reports around alcohol – red wine is good for you, a small amount of alcohol a day is good for your health, and on the other hand, alcohol should be avoided, even a small amount of alcohol on a daily basis can raise the likelihood of certain cancers. Therefore as individuals we all have to decide what information we use for ourselves and our lifestyles.

There are many proven health problems associated with drinking, some immediate, such as vomiting, risk of accidents, slowed breathing, impotence, and then longer term problems for regular drinkers such as heart disease, stroke, raised blood pressure, liver disease, stomach damage, memory loss,, some cancers, weight loss and impaired fertility. Mental health problems such as depression, cognitive dysfunction, suicidal thoughts, self harm are regularly reported by problematic drinkers.

How Much Is "Normal" ?

Many people enjoy alcohol, perhaps occasionally with a meal, regularly on nights out and are able take it or leave it. However drinking excessively and with the purpose of getting drunk appears to be part of some people's lives. Teenagers seem to be using larger quantities of alcohol at a younger age, many students and people in their twenties are reported in the press as binge drinkers. It has also been reported that many people are regularly drinking a bottle of wine every night with a meal after getting home from work.

Therefore how do you know if alcohol is a problem for you or for your family member or friend?

The government has recommended DAILY guidelines for sensible drinking:

- Females - 2-3 units or less
- Males - 3-4 units or less

They state that refraining on one day does not mean that you can consume more the next day! Calculating your units can be complicated even though most manufacturers now list the units/alcohol content on bottles. If you are taking certain medication, using machinery or driving a vehicle, these guidelines will not be appropriate and a no alcohol rule would be necessary.

One unit of alcohol = half a standard pint of beer (alc 3.5% vol)
25ml serving of spirit (alc 40% vol)
half a 175ml glass of wine (alc 12% vol)

Therefore one large glass (250ml) of wine will take a female to her daily limit and one pint of 6% lager will take a male to within his limit, which might come as a surprise for a lot of drinkers.

Please see the questionnaires '**AM I DRINKING TOO MUCH?**' and '**ARE THEY DRINKING TOO MUCH?**'.

They will hopefully be able to highlight a problematic drinker and perhaps start the process of them seeking help and support.

Am I Dependent On Alcohol?

How do we define addiction?

A good definition of addiction is 'psychological, emotional and physical reliance on a substance or behaviour, typically characterised by cravings and compulsive use and withdrawal symptoms. This behaviour is repeated despite clear evidence of negative consequences'.

If you or your family member/friend has ticked yes to more than a couple of the questions in '**AM I DRINKING TOO MUCH**' / '**ARE THEY DRINKING TOO MUCH?**' – it may be advisable to seek a professional opinion.

There can be different opinions around whether a person is either abusing alcohol or is dependent upon alcohol. A person's problematic drinking may have come about in different ways: - They may have a genetic link (family member has/had a problem with a substance) and therefore a pre-disposition to addiction

They may be using alcohol to cope with: -

- a traumatic childhood
- a traumatic event in their life
- bullying
- abuse
- grief and loss
- self esteem/confidence issues
- insomnia
- divorce
- retirement
- financial difficulties
- stress and anxiety
- A gradual increase in alcohol intake with no particular reason

Some drinkers may drink on a daily basis, sometimes called top up drinkers. They will drink to alleviate their withdrawal symptoms and to feel "normal". Others may binge drink, perhaps once every month or couple of weeks, but when they do drink they lose control of their consumption and drink until they physically cannot drink any more. Binges may last a couple of days but in a dependent drinker will become longer and closer together. There can be a real risk of "overdosing" on alcohol this way and as most women cannot tolerate alcohol as much as men, this can be a dangerous practice.

Alcoholism has been classified as an illness by the World Health Organisation – affecting the physical, psychological and social elements of the drinker.

Problematic drinkers may well deny they have a problem and will rationalise and make it OK for themselves to continue to drink. They may blame others around them for "making" them drink. This is when it becomes important for the family to get some help for themselves as they can very easily be drawn into the drinkers cycle of destruction. Family members can also become "enablers" and by covering up for them, adapting their own behaviour around the drinker and by providing a home, money or security, they enable the drinker to carry on drinking.

At this stage consequences of their drinking may begin to impact: -

- Health issues
- Lack of appetite
- Absenteeism from college/work
- Arguments within the family
- Loss of driving licence
- Avoiding friends
- Financial cost of drinking
- Domestic violence



Treatment Options

Once the drinker has accepted that they need help, (which may be long after the family member has recognised this), unfortunately it may then be a long time before they actually do anything about it. Therefore it's important that they have options and know just what help they can access when they are ready to get it.

Help and support can come in different ways: -

- Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings
- Community Alcohol Services
- Support Groups
- General Practitioners
- Counselling
- Home detoxification
- In patient Treatment Programmes

Abbey Gisburne Park can offer you or your family member a free assessment to enable you to explore just what is available and identify what would be appropriate treatment at that time.

Useful Numbers/Contacts

Drinkline	0800 876 6776	Helpline
Drink Check	www.drinkcheck.nhs.uk	On line questions
Drinkaware	www.drinkaware.co.uk	Raising awareness
Truth about booze	www.truthaboutbooze.com	Advice for teenagers
ADFAM	www.adfam.org.uk	Advice for families
AlAnon	www.al-anonuk.org.uk 02074030888	Support groups for families
Alcoholics Anonymous	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk	Support meetings
FRANK	www.talktofrank.com 0800 776600	Drugs awareness and information

Disclaimer:

The content within the Dr Arun Ghosh Alcohol and Drug Information is provided as general information only and should therefore not be a substitute for your own GP or Consultant's care and guidance. Dr Arun Ghosh is not therefore liable for any diagnosis made from this information. The links provided are intended as further help and guidance and Dr Arun Ghosh is not responsible for their content. Dr Arun Ghosh would always suggest you consult your GP if you have any concerns around your own health.