

LESS IS MORE

A Guide to Rethinking Your Drinking



Facts Myths Limits Drink Diary
Blackout Be Ready Slips



HEALTH
PROMOTION
UNIT

Thinking of cutting down?

Need some help?

This booklet is for you.

LESS IS MORE

Less alcohol...More money, more energy, more control

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This booklet is not for you if you need to stop drinking, or if you think you might be dependent on alcohol.

No booklet is a substitute for talking to someone who is trained to help you. Your GP or Health Board can advise you about Alcohol Counselling Services in your area (Health Board numbers on rear cover).

LESS IS MORE Less alcohol...More money, more energy, more control

LESS ALCOHOL, MORE...?

Less alcohol, **More** likely to avoid

NOW

Arguments

Doing things you regret

Unplanned/unprotected sex, unwanted pregnancy

Blowing all your money on drink

Nursing a hangover all weekend

Accidents, injuries

Victim of mugging, assault

□ DOWN THE ROAD

□ Break up of relationships

□ Alcohol dependency

□ Depression, anxiety

□ Liver disease, certain cancers

□ Money worries

□ Job loss

Rethinking Your Drinking

Start by listing the **good** things and **bad** things about your drinking.

Good things about my drinking

e.g. Helps me relax
Gets me out of the house
Good buzz

Bad things about my drinking

e.g. Rows
Always broke
Tired, no energy

These are examples. Add your own.

If there are some things about your drinking that you don't like, you could benefit from cutting down.



“But I’m no alcoholic”

You don't have to be dependent on alcohol to benefit from drinking less. If your drinking is linked to any problems you have – small or serious – cutting down can help.

Alcohol problems are mostly caused by ‘alcoholics’.

Myth. Immediate problems like motor accidents, violent assaults and accidental injury are mostly caused by moderate drinkers who occasionally overdo it.

FACT OR MYTH?

EMPHASIS MARK WHAT YOU NEED TO CHANGE

TOP TIP

DRINK DIARY

Keep a Drink Diary for a week or two to see what you need to change. Record *how much, when, and where you drink and any unwanted outcomes.*

TOO MUCH?

Low risk – Weekly drinking limits

UP TO 14 standard drinks a **week** for women
UP TO 21 for men

- ☐ **Spread out** over the week with some alcohol-free days.
- ☐ (More about **weekly limits** and **standard drinks** inside ☐ ☐ rear cover.)

Binge drinking – 6 or more drinks at a time.

Greater risk of problems now (e.g. arguments, doing things you regret, accidents), and of health problems later if you regularly binge drink.

TOO FAST?

- Get drunk, lose control quicker
- Strain on liver and body
- Can be a warning sign of a drink problem developing

Other early warning signs of a drink problem developing

High tolerance (can drink a lot before feeling drunk)
Can't stop drinking once you start
Secretly doubling up, sneaking drinks
Blackouts
Feeling guilty after drinking
Needing a drink first thing in the morning to recover

FACT OR MYTH?

Drinking coffee sobers you up.

Myth. *Your liver is like a car with one gear. It can only work at one speed. So there is only one cure for drunkenness – TIME. Drinking coffee will make you a wide awake drunk. Taking a cold shower will make you a cold wet drunk.*

SET TARGETS

Now you've decided to cut down, set yourself some targets.

Be specific

e.g. I will drink no more than.....times a week

I will consume no more than.....drinks each time

I will not drink when: I'm going to drive

I'm working

I haven't eaten

I'm playing sport

These are examples. Add your own.

TOP TIP

KNOW YOUR LIMIT

If we're honest, most of us know the point where we start to lose control. Your main target should be not to exceed this amount.

WARNING

If you regularly drink heavily, or think you might be dependent on alcohol, it could be dangerous to greatly change your drinking without medical support. Your GP or local Alcohol Counselling Service can help.

A 'blackout' is when you pass out from drink.

Myth. It's a type of memory loss. Your friends can recite what you did, but you can't. Early warning sign to cut down.

FACT OR MYTH?

SNAGLIST



Heavy drinking is usually linked to certain people, places and times. These could be your downfalls when you try to cut down. Avoid this by making a **snaglist** of these situations, and planning in advance how you will deal with them.

My snaglist

How I will deal with them

Getting paid
Feeling lonely or bored
Tension at home

These are examples. Add your own.

FACT OR MYTH?

It's not safe to drink when you're pregnant.

Fact. The alcohol you drink enters your baby's bloodstream. Opinion is divided about how much or whether it is safe for pregnant women to drink, so it is probably best not to drink at all. Binge drinking is certainly out because of the high concentration of alcohol. Regular heavy drinking can cause Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, with serious developmental problems for the baby.

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MAKE A DATE

There is seldom an ideal time to cut down, so pick a time when you're not under too much pressure and **go for it!**

Remember to stick to your **targets**, and how to handle situations from your **snaglist**.

TOP TIP

TIP OFF A FRIEND

Tell close friends and family that you will be cutting down. Ask them to help by doing non-pub things with you, and by backing you up when you are out.



Women can't "hold" their drink as well as men.

Fact. Men have more bodily fluids than women, so alcohol is more dilute in their systems. This even goes for women and men of the same height and build.

FACT OR MYTH?

OK, NOW WHAT?

TOP TIP

KEY TO SUCCESS

Have other things to do that don't involve alcohol. E.g. family time, hobbies, course, work. The less room in your life for heavy drinking, the better your chance of success in the long run.

- **Be ready** for anyone that pushes you. People respect your decision better when you're honest, but a few excuses in the early days might help. E.g. "driving home", "match in the morning", "doctor's orders".
- Go out **later** and bring less money.
- **Don't borrow** and avoid running a tab.
- Steer clear of late-night **drinking parties**, and don't bring home take outs.

• TIPS FOR SLOWER DRINKING:

S maller drinks, e.g. a glass, bottle or shandy instead of a pint. A single instead of a double.

L eave your glass down between sips, and leave it empty for a while before getting another.

O ccupy yourself. Play pool, music, dance, chat.

W hy stick to minerals to break up your alcoholic drinks? Try alcohol-free beers, wines, cocktails. Very effective for getting people off your case too.

E at before and while you drink.

R ounds should be avoided. If it's too awkward, then buy yourself a mineral when it's your shout.

FACT OR MYTH?

Alcohol is good for your heart.

Unknown. Evidence is mixed, but some experts suggest 1 or 2 drinks a day for women over the menopause and men over 40 can help lessen the risk of heart disease.

REAP THE REWARDS

Well done for getting this far.

Reward your hard work by buying something from the money saved on drink.

Relish the freedom from hangover and regrets.

If you feel yourself slipping,

Remind yourself why you are cutting down, and of what you have gained so far.



FEELINGS

If you use alcohol to help you express or cope with feelings (like shyness, tension or anger), then drinking less may leave you feeling more exposed. You will eventually need to take the time to work on this, and should seek help to get you through. Start by talking to those close to you and consider how the outside support of a counsellor might help.

Alcohol causes as much damage to society as heroin.

Myth. Alcohol causes many times more damage than heroin and all the other illegal drugs put together. E.g. it is a factor in 88% of public order offences, 34% of marital breakdowns and 33% of fatal road accidents.

END OF THE ROAD?

TOP TIP

TIME PLEASE!
If you overdo it, give your body at least 48 hours without alcohol to recover.

A slip is not an excuse to give up, and it is definitely not the end of the road. It can take more than one attempt to successfully change your drinking.

Find out **why** you slipped and plan how to avoid this next time.

Set a new date and **try again**.

What if I keep failing?

If you find it very difficult to control your drinking, you could be dependent on alcohol.

Other signs include:

- Craving alcohol
- Withdrawals like tremors, nausea, hot and cold sweats, anxiety, depression
- Needing a drink first thing in the morning
- Neglecting family or work because of your drinking

It can be hard to admit to a serious drink problem, but with help it can be overcome. Your GP or Health Board can advise you about Alcohol Counselling Services in your area (Health Board numbers are listed on the rear cover).

FACT OR MYTH?

There's nothing to do around here except drink.

Myth. Drinking is a big feature of Irish social life, but is not the only pastime. Take a minute to think of 3 non-drinking things you could do. It's just a matter of looking at things differently.

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WEEKLY DRINKING LIMITS – LOW RISK

Low Risk

Up to 14 standard drinks for women

Up to 21 standard drinks for men

Standard drinks (SD) contain roughly 10g of pure alcohol.



☐

A word of caution

- ☐ There is mixed evidence about the use of weekly ☐
- ☐ limits. They certainly do not apply to people who ☐
- ☐ are pregnant, ill, run down, on medication, or to ☐
- ☐ children.

When is a drink not a standard drink?

Compare these selected drinks and note the vast differences in alcohol content.

TOP TIP

SAY WHEN

Home measures tend to be a lot larger than pub ones. If you're visiting, try a bottle or can instead of a short. It's easier to watch what you're having.



NOTES

Health Board contact numbers for further advice

Eastern Regional Health Authority Helpline	1800 459 459
Mid-Western Health Board Drug & Alcohol Helpline	1850 700 850
Midland Health Board Alcohol Counselling Services	0502 78 282
North-Eastern Health Board 24-hr Health Board information line....	1850 24 1850
South-Eastern Health Board	051 846 720
Western Health Board Alcohol Treatment	091 753 595
North-Western Health Board Customer Information	1850 742 000
Southern Health Board	021 496 8933

This booklet has been produced by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health & Children as part of the 'Less is More' Alcohol Awareness Campaign. Further facts about alcohol from your local Health Promotion office and online at www.healthpromotion.ie

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