

go on .....

help yourself





**So, you drink alcohol?** You are certainly not alone: 9 in 10 UK adults do too. You could say it's our nation's favourite drug.

For many people this is a pleasant experience with no negative side effects or problems. For others, however, the enjoyment of drinking alcohol is overshadowed by the negative effects that alcohol can have on them and the problems that this can cause.

Problems may be more common than you think. Did you know ...?

**1 in 4 adults is a hazardous drinker**

This ¼ of the adult population will have:

- experienced loss of memory
- injured themselves or another
- failed to do what was expected of them, i.e. turn up at work the morning after

**1 in 13 is dependent on alcohol**

That's twice as many as are hooked on drugs, illegal and prescription!

Where do you fit in to all this? Sensible? Hazardous? Dependent?  
Should you be concerned? How would you actually know?

This booklet aims to help you find out the answers to all of these questions and to decide what to do next. By working through it, in private and in your own time, you can consider:

- what you drink and how this compares to recommended safe levels
- how alcohol gets in and out of the body and what it does to the body as it travels around
- why you drink, what drink does for you and the benefits of cutting down

You can then decide:

- what your goal is
- how you can reduce your drinking (small changes can have a big impact!)
- who can give you a helping hand should you want more support

So, is this booklet for you? To find out, start by completing the questionnaire overleaf. Be as honest as you can; there's no point in kidding yourself. This is your first step in helping yourself!

Before you get stuck into the questionnaire, a quick clarification of units. (You'll need this for question 2 and it's vital that you're accurate).

Alcohol is best measured in units. In simple terms, 1 unit of alcohol =

- ½ a pint of 3.5%ABV (Alcohol By Volume - you can find this figure on the bottle or can) lager, beer or cider
- a single (25 ml) shot of 40% ABV spirits
- a small (125 ml) glass of 9% wine
- a pub (50 ml) measure of sherry or port

1 unit of alcohol simply means that the drink contains 10ml of ethanol, or pure alcohol. This is why a small measure of a strong drink such as whisky is the same as ½ a pint of a weaker drink like lager. Strengths of drinks, however, vary widely. The mathematical way to work out the units in your favourite drink is:

$\% \text{ ABV (this will be on the bottle)} \times \text{volume of drink (in millilitres)} \div 1000$

If this seems like too much hard work, here's a list of the unit value of some popular drinks!

- large (250 ml) glass of 12% ABV wine: 3 units
- bottle of 12% ABV wine: 9 units
- pint of export (5% ABV) lager, e.g. Stella Artois: 3 units
- bottle of export (5% ABV) lager, e.g. Budweiser: 1½ units
- bottle of Bacardi Breezer, Smirnoff Ice, etc: 1½ units
- can of strong (9% ABV) lager, e.g. Special Brew: 4 units

If you tend to drink spirits at home, it's best to guess around 2-3 units per glass - we tend to be quite generous and rarely pour pub measures at home!

**Worked out the units in your favourite drinks?  
Then you're ready to start!**

# A.U.D.I.T. Questionnaire

One drink/unit =  $\frac{1}{2}$  pint of beer or 1 glass of wine or 1 single spirit

Please answer the following 10 questions as honestly as possible by circling your answer and adding up the corresponding points in the left hand column.

1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

- 0 never
- 1 monthly or less
- 2 2 to 4 times a month
- 3 2 to 3 times a week
- 4 4 or more times per week

2. How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?

- 0 1 or 2
- 1 3 or 4
- 2 5 or 6
- 3 7, 8 or 9
- 4 10+

3. How often do you have 8 or more units of alcohol on one occasion?

- 0 never
- 1 less than monthly
- 2 monthly
- 3 weekly
- 4 daily or almost daily

4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?
- 0 never
  - 1 less than monthly
  - 2 monthly
  - 3 weekly
  - 4 daily or almost daily
5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?
- 0 never
  - 1 less than monthly
  - 2 monthly
  - 3 weekly
  - 4 daily or almost daily
6. How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning, to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?
- 0 never
  - 1 less than monthly
  - 2 monthly
  - 3 weekly
  - 4 daily or almost daily
7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?
- 0 never
  - 1 less than monthly
  - 2 monthly
  - 3 weekly
  - 4 daily or almost daily

8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?

- 0 never
- 1 less than monthly
- 2 monthly
- 3 weekly
- 4 daily or almost daily

9. Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

- 0 no
- 1 yes, but not in the last year
- 4 yes, during the last year

10. Has a relative, friend, doctor or another health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

- 0 no
- 1 yes, but not in the last year
- 4 yes, during the last year

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Have you totalled up your score?

Read on to find out what type of drinker you are.

**AUDIT score of 1-7:                      Low-risk drinker**

Congratulations! You are a moderate drinker and are therefore unlikely to be experiencing alcohol-related problems. Remember an adult woman should be drinking no more than 2-3 units a day. For an adult male the maximum daily recommended level is 3-4 units. It is advisable for both men and women to have at least 2 alcohol-free days each week. This gives the body tissue a chance to rest and also means you're less likely to become dependent. Carry on drinking in accordance with these guidelines and you should continue to enjoy the benefits of safe drinking!

**AUDIT score of 8-19:                      High-risk drinker**

You may already be worried about your drinking, or you may not be experiencing any problems at present, however, you are at risk of:

- developing chronic physical and mental health conditions due to regular heavy drinking
- work, relationship or social problems or even injury and violence as a result of frequent heavy drinking sessions

Read on to learn more about alcohol and the benefits of cutting down. Making just small changes to your drinking can have a big impact on your health and lifestyle. Lots of support is also available should you want to talk to someone about your drinking. These services are listed at the back of this manual. Good luck with your move towards safer drinking!

**AUDIT score of 20+:                      Probable alcohol dependence**

There is a possibility that you are dependent on alcohol. Signs of dependence include feeling shaky or nauseous in the morning, or being able to drink very large amounts of alcohol without feeling drunk. Drinking at this level is endangering your health and may be affecting those around you. Continuing with this manual will be helpful, but you should also consult your GP or one of the specialist alcohol services listed at the end of this manual for further diagnosis and help. It is advisable for you to abstain from drinking, at least for a period of time, but do not attempt to do so without seeking medical help. Withdrawal from alcohol can be very dangerous if unsupervised but there is medication and plenty of support to help you change your lifestyle. Good luck!

## Knowing your limits

So, how much *should* we be drinking? The recommended safe guidelines are:

Women: up to 2 or 3 units a day

Men: up to 3 or 4 units a day

with at least two alcohol-free days each week for both sexes

This is low-risk drinking.

There are, however, exceptions to these guidelines. These include:

- if driving or operating machinery
- if pregnant or breast feeding
- if taking medication that reacts with alcohol
- if suffering a medical condition that is worsened by alcohol

In these instances it is best to abstain from alcohol completely or get specific guidance from your GP.

If you are unsure exactly how much you are drinking each week, an excellent way to find out is to complete a **drink diary** (shown later in the booklet). Each day note down:

- what you drink
- how much you drink (in units)
- where you drink
- who you drink with
- how you feel (before and after drinking)
- how much you've spent on alcohol

This may seem like quite a lot of detail but if you are looking to reduce your drinking this will help you build a pattern of your “high risk situations”, in other words occasions when you are most likely to drink. It will also help you get a feel for your triggers to drinking. This may be whenever you go to a certain pub, whenever you are out with a particular person, when you have a stressful day, or simply whenever you get paid!

Of course, you don't need to take your drink diary out to the pub (!), but completing this as soon as possible after drinking will help you build an accurate picture. If you're going out for a special occasion and are likely to be drinking a lot, monitor your drinks by putting a penny in your pocket each time you have a drink. Or note down how much cash you are taking out and work out how much you drank from your remaining change. Whatever works for you; this is all about self-awareness.

Have a go at completing the diary on the next page, either for the previous week (if you can remember!), or for the week ahead. You'll find more blank copies towards the end of this booklet.

## DRINK DIARY

Day	Place	Time/who with	How did you feel?	Type of drink	No. of drinks	Units	Money spent (£)
Sun							
Mon							
Tues							
Wed							
Thur							
Fri							
Sat							
Total							

# Alcohol: the low-down

Some facts about alcohol. Did you know that alcohol..?

- is a toxin, a poisonous substance
- is a drug, albeit a legal one
- is a depressant drug (it depresses the central nervous system, affecting our co-ordination and impairing our judgement)
- can be both physically and psychologically addictive
- travels around the body in the blood (so no part of the body is immune from the effects of alcohol)
- hits the brain within 2 to 7 minutes of being swallowed
- is removed from a healthy body by the liver at a steady rate of 1 unit an hour (consequently drinking black coffee or lots of water or even being sick will not help sober you up – only time can do this)
- is responsible for around 33,000 deaths in the UK each year (less than 20% of these deaths are from long-term heavy drinking; many of the rest are as a result of intoxication, e.g. drink drive, homicide, suicide, drowning, deaths in fires, etc)

How may alcohol be affecting me?

Drinking above the recommended safe levels can affect your health in a number of ways. The higher your consumption, the higher your risk of developing:

- gastrointestinal problems (vomiting, malnutrition, bleeding, severe inflammation of the stomach, ulcers)
- bowel and bladder problems (diarrhoea, constipation, incontinence, cystitis)
- heart problems (high blood pressure, weakness of the heart muscles, heart failure)
- liver damage
- cancer (of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, liver)
- damage to your nerve endings (numbness and tingling, especially in toes and fingers)

- sexual health problems (infertility – in men and in women, impaired sexual performance, risk of STI 's and unwanted pregnancy, risk of giving birth to deformed, retarded or low birth weight babies)
  - mental health problems (memory loss, alcohol dependence, depression, anxiety, mood swings, aggressive or irrational behaviour, violent conduct)
- 
- 

**Drinking at high levels also increases your risk of accidents and may lead to social, legal, domestic, job and financial problems.**

### A good reason to cut down?

As well as reducing your risk of all of the above, cutting your consumption may also:

- help you sleep better
- save you money
- improve your relationships
- help you stay looking younger (heavy drinking dramatically increases the ageing process)
- keep you in better physical shape (alcohol is loaded with calories)
- improve your concentration and memory
- make you happier (remember: alcohol is a depressant)
- give you more time to enjoy other things (no more hangovers, wasting time in bed)

### Think about your drinking

Why do you choose to drink alcohol? What does it do for you? How would cutting down improve your life? Take a few minutes to complete the following chart. Think carefully and honestly about how your drinking affects each of these categories, both positively and negatively.

	+	-
Family and Relationships		
Work		
Health		
Financial Situation		

Do you find that the costs of drinking outweigh the benefits? It is often the case that we can find lots of short-term benefits of drinking, but the long-term costs usually outweigh these. What will happen if you continue to drink at your current level? Can you identify 3 personal reasons to reduce your drinking? Write them in the space below.

1.

2.

3.

## Making the change

How do you go about improving your health and your lifestyle? Your ultimate goal should be to drink at the recommended safe levels, unless of course you wish to stop drinking altogether.

If you do wish to abstain completely, please remember to seek medical advice before stopping drinking, as this can be highly dangerous if unsupervised. Your GP will also be able to prescribe medication to make the withdrawal process more comfortable.

Depending on your current drinking levels the sensible levels may be hard to achieve immediately. It is really important to set a realistic and achievable goal, one that you really think you can stick to. If you do not do this you may become disheartened, in fact you'll probably set yourself up to fail.

Remember that any change is positive, no matter how small or gradual.

Try to set a realistic daily limit, then try to reduce this a week at a time. (Week 1: 8 units a day, Week 2: 7 units a day, and so on).

## Tips for cutting down

- Set a time "I will not drink before ..."
- Set a budget "I will only take out £10 cash, when it's gone, I'll go home"
- Keep self monitoring – if possible note your drink on your drink diary BEFORE drinking it. This will help keep you focused. Do you really want it now? Could you wait a little longer?
- Drink more slowly. Set a time limit for each drink. Sip, don't gulp! Put your drink down in between sips – holding a drink means that you drink much faster.

- If you drink spirits, use mixers. Try to gradually reduce the proportion of alcohol and increase the proportion of mixer: 75 alc/25 mix, 50 alc/50 mix, 25 alc/75 mix, maybe right down to no alcohol at all, just a soft drink.
- Change to a lower strength drink. Just dropping a couple of %ABV will have dramatic results:
  - Drinking an 11%ABV wine rather than 13%ABV wine will save 1.5 units a bottle.
  - Changing from export to standard strength lager will save nearly a unit a pint.
  - Changing from super strength cans, i.e. Tennents, to export cans, i.e. Stella will save over 1.5 units a can.

Add these up over a week and the differences can be quite dramatic – and that’s without actually reducing your number of drinks at all!

- Don’t drink alcohol to quench your thirst. Alcohol is a diuretic (it expels water from your body), so actually dehydrates you. Quench your thirst with a soft drink first, then enjoy your alcoholic drink by savouring the flavour and sipping it slowly
- Set yourself a reward system for achievement of your goals – this may be an activity that you do not normally do, or a material treat. Reward yourself for your efforts!
- Look at different ways of dealing with difficult situations. You may benefit from courses such as stress management, anger management or developing confidence skills, or resources, such as books and leaflets. The services listed at the back of this manual can advise on local courses.

## High risk situations

As well as trying different ways of cutting down it is important to gain an understanding of when and why you tend to over-drink. We can call these your "high risk situations".

By keeping and reviewing drink diaries you should be able to see patterns to your drinking. There may be certain times when you're more likely to drink than others. Examples of these may be:

- in situations where you are with others who expect you to join them
- when you're feeling bored, depressed or lonely
- after rows or arguments with family or friends
- when you get paid
- when you're feeling stressed or under pressure
- when you can't sleep
- at parties or social events

With the help of your diaries and the above list, make a note of 3 situations in which you are most likely to drink too much:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Pick one of these and consider different ways that you can avoid this situation or cope with it. An example could be:

**SITUATION:** Drinking with friends after work

**SOLUTIONS:** Go straight home

Only go out for a drink after work 2 days a week

Limit the number of drinks at the pub to 2

Drink a lower strength drink

Drink only soft drinks

Find another activity to do after work, i.e. exercise

Work a little later so you leave separately

Hang around with different people

Once you have drawn up a list, mark the most realistic solution to the situation. Repeat this process with each of your **high risk** situations. You now have a practical plan of action!

High Risk Situation	Plan of Action

## Keeping positive

Making changes is always difficult. If for one day you do not achieve your goal, do not despair. View it as a small lapse and see what you can learn from the situation. Don't undo the good that you have undone by thinking "I've blown it, I can't do this, I may as well carry on as before". Keep positive, focus on all you have achieved and vow to try harder the next day. Remind yourself of your reasons for cutting down, be that health, money or relationships. Remember: you're doing this for you. We all have bad days; don't give in. You can succeed.

## A helping hand

Having a source of support when making changes can be really helpful. Do you have someone you can talk openly and truthfully to about your drinking plans in confidence? Maybe a friend, family member or colleague?

You may prefer to seek support from someone neutral, someone that is not involved in your personal situation. Listed in the next section are Bedfordshire and national agencies that can support you in achieving your goals.

Good luck with helping yourself!

## Finding help

Below are some options for you as your 'next step', including details of services you can access.

You can do some more research on alcohol...

[www.howsyourdrink.org.uk](http://www.howsyourdrink.org.uk)

[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

[www.alcohol-services.co.uk](http://www.alcohol-services.co.uk)

[www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

You can ring someone to talk over your situation and then decide what is best for you do...

Drinkline (national) 0800 917 8282

### James Kingham project

Luton 01582 723434 & Bedford 01234 344133

This project supports people to reduce the impact that alcohol is having on their lives, providing 1 to 1 sessions, counselling, group support, relaxation/aromatherapy, women only sessions and the opportunity to drop-in and chat when you need to get away from it all.

### P.U.K.E.

This project provides support especially for young people and stands for Prevention, Understanding, Knowledge and Education.

Go to see your GP

Your GP may refer you for detoxification (which is carried out at home or in a unit).

# GOOD LUCK!

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Mon							
Tues							
Wed							
Thur							
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Sat							
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Total							

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alcohol services for the community  
26/30 john street, luton, lu1 2je  
01582 723434  
[www.alcohol-services.co.uk](http://www.alcohol-services.co.uk)