

Binge drinking in today's society

The term 'binge drinking' generally refers to drinking heavily over a short period of time with the intention of getting drunk, resulting in immediate and severe intoxication.

Binge drinking can be harmful in a number of ways:

- **Short-term harms**, including hangovers, headaches, nausea, shakiness and possibly vomiting and memory loss. There is also the risk of alcohol poisoning which can cause death.
- **Behaviour-based risks**, including falls, assaults, car accidents, shame and embarrassment, loss of valuable items, and financial losses through reckless spending while intoxicated, or loss of income through time off work. Alcohol can also continue to affect you the following day. Hangovers can significantly increase lapses in attention and can impair your ability to work or drive.
- **Long-term harms**, including becoming dependent on alcohol, and developing liver or brain damage.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink is one that contains 10 grams of alcohol. Each of these drinks equals approximately one standard drink:

Keep in mind that not all drinks contain the same concentration of alcohol, and most venues do not serve standard drink sizes. Just because your bartender is pouring your glass to a certain point, it doesn't mean they are giving you a standard drink.

Beware of bigger glasses, bottles or cans which hold more than one standard drink. If you're not sure, read the label.



Did you know:

- 1 in 6 Australian drinkers consume more than 11 drinks in one setting¹
- In 2012, there were almost 154, 000 incidents where people required medical treatment after drinking²

How to avoid alcohol-related harms

While there is no safe level of drinking, the National Health and Medical Research Council recommends adults drink no more than two standard drinks on any day or four standard drinks on any one occasion to reduce the risk of harm.

Not drinking is the safest option for anyone under 18 years of age, pregnant or breastfeeding women, and women who are planning a pregnancy.

Some tips for low-risk drinking

- **Set limits for yourself and stick to them.** Don't let other people pressure you into drinking more than you want.
- **Quench your thirst first.** Have a non-alcoholic drink first if you are thirsty.
- **Drink slowly.** Take sips, not gulps.
- **Drink from a small glass.** Some wine glasses can hold several standard drinks.
- **Be aware of exactly what you are drinking.** Remember that 'alcopops' (ready-to-drink or pre-mixed spirits or wine) can be quite strong, even though they don't taste like strong alcohol.
- **Try a low-alcohol or non-alcoholic alternative.**
- **Eat before and while drinking, but avoid salty snacks, which can make you thirsty.**
- **Avoid getting into 'rounds' or 'shouts'.** They are likely to make you drink more than you would otherwise.
- **Avoid 'top ups'.** Drink one drink at a time so it's easier to keep track of how much you are drinking.
- **Stay busy.** Don't just sit and drink. Dancing games or playing music can take the focus away from drinking.

If you're worried about your drinking, see your doctor or contact the alcohol and other drug service in your state or territory.

Adapted from the DrugInfo fact sheet "The facts about binge drinking" (2009, www.druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/the-facts-about-binge-drinking-web-fact-sheet).

¹Livingston, M. (2013). *Measuring risky drinking: An examination of the validity of different episodic drinking thresholds in predicting alcohol-related harms*. Canberra: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education.

²Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2011). *2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report*. Canberra : AIHW.

Factsheet

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