

How much is too much?

In Australia, alcohol is a significant risk factor for injury and ill health, violence, crime, family breakdown, road accidents, loss of productivity in workplaces, and death.

Most people seem to understand how much alcohol they can drink to remain under the legal limits for driving, but many are confused about how much alcohol they can drink before it could be harmful to their health and wellbeing.

While there is no safe level of drinking, this fact sheet outlines the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines¹ to help people make informed decisions about drinking and reducing the risk of harm.

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



Guideline 1: Reducing the risk of alcohol-related harm over a lifetime

The more alcohol a person drinks, the greater their risk of developing an alcohol-related injury or disease during their lifetime.

Healthy men and women should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day.

If this guideline is followed, the lifetime risk of death from an alcohol-related injury or disease is less than one in 100. Every drink above this level increases the risk.

Guideline 2: Reducing the risk of injury on a single occasion of drinking

The more alcohol a person drinks on a single occasion, the greater their risk of an immediate alcohol-related injury.

Healthy men and women should drink no more than four standard drinks on any one occasion.

Drinking four standard drinks on a single occasion more than doubles the risk of injury in the following six hours. This risk increases rapidly with each additional drink.

Did you know²:

- 1 in 5 Australian workers drink alcohol at levels that put them at greater risks of developing alcohol-related diseases

Guideline 3: Children and young people under 18 years of age

For children and young people under 18 years of age, not drinking is the safest option.

Dangerous behaviour is more likely among young people when they drink compared to when older people drink.

The brain is still developing during the teenage years and drinking alcohol during this time may damage the brain and lead to health complications later in life.

The earlier a child is introduced to alcohol the more likely they are to develop problems with it later in life.

Guideline 4: Pregnancy and breastfeeding

For women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy, or breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

Drinking while pregnant can cause problems, such as bleeding, miscarriage, stillbirth and premature birth.

When a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol travels through the placenta to the unborn baby. This can affect the development of the baby, including causing slowed growth and a range of physical, mental, behavioural and learning disabilities.

Alcohol reduces a mother's milk supply and also passes through the blood stream into breast milk. This may affect the baby's feeding and sleeping patterns, as well as its psychomotor development.

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 "Pregnancy and alcohol" (2012, druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/pregnancy-and-alcohol-web-fact-sheet).

¹ National Health and Medical Research Council 2009 *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*, Canberra: National Health and Medical Research Council.

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

Factsheet

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**ALCOHOL AND DRUGS
IN THE WORKPLACE**

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