

Drinking alcohol too much or too often can cause significant harm to you, your family and community.

Cheers? Alcohol and your family



ENGLISH

How drinking alcohol affects you

Alcohol slows down communication between a drinker's brain and their body: it is a depressant drug.

This means that it:

- impairs your physical coordination
- reduces your concentration
- slows your responses
- exaggerates your mood.

In small amounts it can lower your inhibitions.

Intoxication

If you drink too much you:

- become confused
- can experience blurred vision
- can lose your balance.

If you keep drinking it can cause nausea and vomiting and can make you pass out. It is also possible for drinking alcohol to result in coma or death.

It is easy to feel more confident and less inhibited when you are drunk. You are more likely to take risks or get yourself or others into risky situations.

Heavy drinking over a long time

If you drink large amounts of alcohol for a long time, your health, family and work life can suffer.

It can cause:

- permanent liver damage
- permanent brain damage
- heart disease
- cancer
- diabetes

- mental health problems
- dementia.

Excessive drinking can lead to arguments at home and these can eventually cause the family or relationship to break up.

You may find that you cannot function properly at work, need to have extra days off, or are responsible for accidents.

If you drink alcohol regularly, after some time you may become dependent on it. You may find that:

- you need to drink more to get through the day
- drinking becomes more important than other activities
- it is hard to limit your drinking.

"Alcohol does damage to the body, after years of drinking the effects can be devastating."

Women and alcohol

Women often have a smaller build than men, with more fatty tissue and smaller livers. This means that women are more easily affected by alcohol.

You may become drunk more quickly and if you are a regular heavy drinker you may develop health problems earlier than a man would. It also increases the risk of getting breast cancer and gynaecological problems.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding

If a pregnant woman drinks alcohol, it crosses the placenta and can affect the baby. If breastfeeding, it can also get into breast milk.

Australian experts recommend that women do not drink any alcohol if they are:

- trying to become pregnant
- pregnant
- breastfeeding.

Alcohol and medications

If you drink alcohol when you are taking certain medications, it can cause undesirable effects. You may find that alcohol affects you more and the results can be unpredictable, unpleasant and dangerous.

Check with your doctor about drinking alcohol if you are taking medication.

Alcohol and violence

Alcohol is a major cause of violence in the community, in public places and in the family.

When people have been drinking they may become aggressive and violent.

In Australia, alcohol contributes to about half of all cases of physical and sexual violence in the home.

Young people and alcohol

Young people's brains continue to grow until they are about 25 years old. Drinking during adolescence can hinder healthy brain development, especially in the areas of learning and memory.

The earlier a young person starts drinking, the greater the chance of developing alcohol-related problems when they are older.

Australian experts advise parents and carers that children under 15 are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and it is especially important that they do not drink alcohol. The safest option for young people aged 15–17 is to postpone their first drink for as long as possible.

Drink driving

Drink driving contributes up to 30 per cent of driver and motor bike rider deaths on Victoria's roads each year.

In Victoria, there is a legal limit on alcohol consumption if you are driving. Losing a driving licence as a result of drink driving can affect work, family, finances and cause other hardships.

"First they lose their licence, then they lose their job because of it or end up in the courts or fighting with their family."

Tips for safer drinking

- Eat before or while you are drinking but avoid salty snacks as they make you thirsty.
- Drink slowly.
- Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Instead of a full strength drink have a low-alcohol alternative.
- Don't be pressured into drinking more than you want or intend to.
- Stay active and busy, don't just sit and drink.
- Have at least two days a week when you don't drink any alcohol.

Where to get help

There are several places you can contact for help:

- Your GP
- Phone help: DirectLine ph **1800 888 236** (for referrals and advice)
- Your local community health centre
- Alcoholics Anonymous ph **(03) 9429 1833**
- Telephone Interpreter Service: **131 450**

For more information

You can find more information from these places:

- Australian Drug Foundation, ph **1300 858 584** or website www.druginfo.adf.org.au
- Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/alcohol
- Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol www.nhmrc.gov.au/your_health/healthy/alcohol/index.htm

Additional information and support (inserted by material distributing agencies or others).

This material is a part of the "Alcohol Information for CALD Groups" project, funded by the Department of Health, Victoria, 2010-2011.