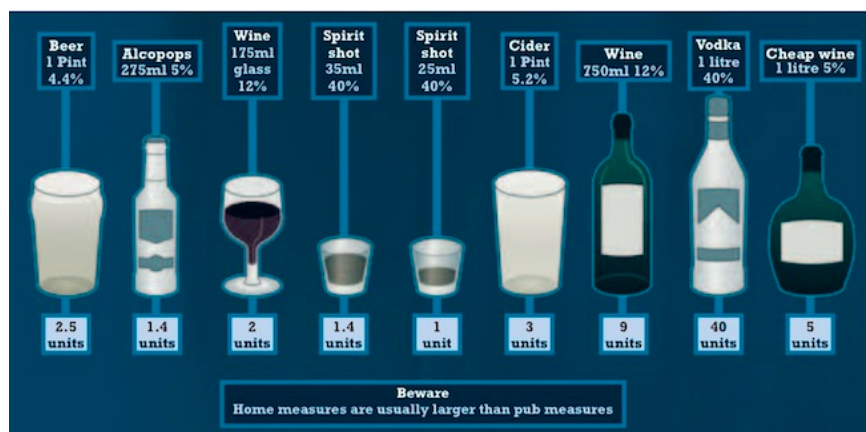




Don't bottle up stress

For Alcohol Awareness Week, malehealth considers the benefits of an 'alco-holiday'. Not only an awful pun but also a really good idea.

We all need help with our problems from time to time - sometimes we look to booze. But, as we also know, drowning your sorrows comes with a big risk attached: sometimes drinking itself becomes the problem. Whilst 75% of people in the UK stay within the recommended limits, 25% - that's one in four of us - drink at risky levels.



So what is risky drinking?

The government advises that men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units per day. (Units are shown in the table above.) Regularly implies drinking every other day or most days. It is recommended that we also have at least two "alco-holidays" (alcohol-free days) a week. Of course, even drinking within the recommended limits is not "safe" because any level of drinking carries some risk.

And what are the risks?

There are a range of risks associated with drinking above recommended limits, such as:

- low energy
- weight gain
- memory loss
- poor sleeping or insomnia
- relationship issues
- sexual difficulties
- injury

In the long-term, drinking too much can lead to:

- cancer
- alcohol dependence
- high blood pressure
- liver disease
- stroke.

If you are a man who regularly drinks more than FOUR units in a day, you are:

- TWICE as likely to develop liver cirrhosis and
- nearly TWICE as likely (1.8 times) to develop high blood pressure.

If you are a man who regularly drink EIGHT or more units in a day - that's twice the recommended limits - you are:

- FOUR times more likely to suffer from high blood pressure,
- FOUR times as likely to suffer from high blood pressure, and
- 3 to 5 times more likely to get cancers of the mouth, neck and throat.

The stats are from the NHS/Department of Health booklet [Your drinking and you: The facts on alcohol, health harms and how to drink less](#) (2010)

So, what's an alco-holiday?

The opposite of a booze cruise! If you often over do it, it might be worth thinking about cutting down a bit.

What do you think the benefits would be? No hangovers for one. Well, that would be good. When you add in the reduced risk of the long-term conditions above and improvements in your overall health, well-being and bank balance, you might decide that cutting down is for you.

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Cutting down needn't be difficult, if you make a plan that works for you or seek support from an alcohol professional. Only you can make the decision to cut down and you will know how best to do it. When thinking about cutting down, there are a few tips that might be useful:

- Have an alcohol free-day once or twice a week
- Plan activities and tasks at those times you would usually drink
- When bored or stressed have a workout instead of drinking
- Explore other interests such as cinema, exercise etc
- Avoid going to the pub after work
- Have you first drink after starting to eat
- Quench your thirst with non-alcohol drinks before and in-between alcoholic drinks
- Avoid drinking in rounds or large groups
- Switch to low alcohol beer/lager
- When you do drink, set yourself a limit and stick to it
- Avoid or limit the time spent with "heavy" drinking friends

WARNING: Whatever you decide to do, it is not safe to stop drinking suddenly. If you are alcohol dependent, you may experience mild to severe withdrawal symptoms and other health conditions. In extreme cases, alcohol withdrawal can be fatal.

What about withdrawal symptoms?

If you have physical withdrawal symptoms (such as shaking, sweating, or feelings of anxiety before you have your first drink of the day), you should seek urgent healthcare advice before stopping to drink completely.

- For support 24/7, call the free helpline Drinkline 0800 917 8282
- More from [Change4Life](#)

This article was written by [HAGA](#), Haringey's community alcohol service, as part of Alcohol Awareness Week 2011 (14-20 November).



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