

22 Tips to Reduce Alcohol Related Harms

CADS are committed to reducing the harms caused by alcohol (and other drugs). One harm reduction strategy is encouraging safer drinking: supporting the people to reduce the amount and frequency of alcohol use or to abstain from alcohol and/or other substances.

Alcohol harm reduction respects personal choice. It is our role to provide information for people to choose healthier and safer ways to use alcohol. The reduction must be a meaningful one with a realistic target.

As with any substance, no use is the safest option. However, if you are choosing to drink alcohol here are 22 ways you can reduce the potential harm to keep yourself and others' safe.

1. Eat before you drink alcohol.

- Eat a meal that includes protein and carbohydrates, e.g., chicken or pizza before and when you are drinking. The alcohol will be absorbed more slowly.
- Note: Eating after you have drunk alcohol has little or no effect.

2. Be well hydrated before you start drinking

- If you have plenty of water in your system it will keep you from feeling thirsty so you will drink more slowly. This in turn means you can drink less and avoid the harms that come with drinking too much.
- When thirsty drink water or have a non-alcoholic drink before using alcohol.

3. Pace your drinks, put the glass down between each sip; take smaller sips

- If you hold on to your glass you tend to drink more. Take small sips occasionally rather than gulping your drink. It takes about one hour (more for women) for your liver to metabolise one standard drink.
- Try using a smaller glass, dilute your alcoholic drinks or switch to a lower alcohol drink.

4. Drink for taste

- Enjoy the taste and savour each mouthful.

5. Alternate your alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks

- Drinking non-alcoholic drinks slows down your alcohol drinking rate. When you have a glass of wine get a glass of water too or alternate plain soft drink, water or fruit juice with spirits, and sip both.
- Be aware of what percentage of alcohol is on the can/bottle before having a drink.

6. Reduce amounts in rounds

- Avoid drinking in rounds, or keeping up with others. Alternatively, buy your own drinks or one round and then go solo; buy your own drinks from then on.

7. Plan your drinking time and for alcohol free days every week

- Avoid daily drinking by having a plan that includes abstinent days and moderate days each week. Your drinking then follows a reasonable schedule and won't interfere with work or life's commitments.
- Plan your drinking time – begin drinking later and leaving the pub/club earlier. For example, if you normally start drinking at 5.00pm try starting at 7.00pm and leaving earlier.

Not drinking for a couple of days a week can boost your confidence. It shows you can change a habit and feel good without alcohol. You could discuss this or get support from a range of people and resources (see point 20).

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- Take a look at the Hello Sunday morning website at www.hellosundaymorning.org and sign up to commit to a period of time without alcohol.
- Two alcohol free days per week is recommended by the World Health Organisation. For more information see www.hpa.org.nz/what-we-do/alcohol

8. Occupy yourself

- Try something else you enjoy while drinking to help distract your attention from the glass.

9. Measure your drinks and set a limit

- Know how many standard drinks you are drinking. At home, pour a standard drink and compare that with what you are drinking. Set yourself a limit about what you will drink when you are out (see Recommended Drinking Guidelines included).

10. Count and record your drinks

Before you can break a habit you need to know more about it. A drinking diary can help you see your pattern when drinking.

- In it you write down the number of standard drinks you drink every day, with a zero to record your abstinent days.
- Record the day, the time, the number of hours spent drinking, the place and company. Record how you felt when you drank and when you didn't, record what you are drinking as soon as you can.

There are several drink diaries and apps available online if you want to do it with your smart device. Just Google 'drink diary' to find one that works for you.

11. Avoid pre-drinking/pre-loading

Drinking before going out to get "warmed up", drinking after work or while cooking dinner are all examples of pre-drinking. Cutting out pre-drinking helps to reduce your daily alcohol consumption.

12. Manage cravings with food or activities

- When the craving comes on, delay the decision to drink alcohol for half an hour.
- Distract yourself by having something to eat. Eating when craving a drink can reduce the cravings for alcohol – though avoid salty snacks which make you thirsty.
- Doing exercise or going for walks can be effective in reducing craving too.

13. Avoid mixing alcohol with other drugs

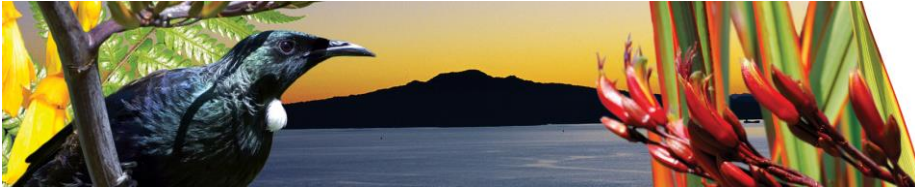
It is potentially dangerous to mix alcohol with other drugs that have a sedative effect.

- Don't mix alcohol with benzodiazepines like Diazepam (Valium), Oxazepam, Clonazepam, morphine, oxycodone, tramadol and codeine and other drugs like ketamine.
- Breathing and other central nervous system activity can slow down to a point where a person can slip into a coma and die.
- NEVER drink alcohol if you are taking GHB, GBL, 14B (slang names "liquid Ecstasy", "Fantasy") as it increases the chances of overdosing.

Check with your doctor about drinking if you have medical conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy or asthma or if you are on medication.

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14. Alcohol and asthma

Alcoholic drinks can trigger a range of allergy-like symptoms including asthma. Wine is the most commonly reported trigger for allergic responses due mainly to histamines and additives like sulphites. When histamines are released into the bloodstream, sneezing, itching, headaches and flushing reactions can occur. Sulphites can trigger an asthma attack.

- If you have asthma and notice that it gets triggered by certain alcoholic drinks, avoid these drinks in future.

15. Avoid alcohol while pregnant

It's not OK to drink while pregnant as there is no known safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy. Every time a pregnant woman drinks, the alcohol passes from her bloodstream through the placenta to the unborn baby. The mother's alcohol level is the same for the unborn baby. Alcohol is also absorbed into the fluid surrounding the unborn baby (amniotic fluid); this fluid is swallowed by the unborn baby.

Alcohol is a toxic substance that can cause birth defects in an unborn baby. Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (FASD) is an umbrella term used to describe a range of development disorders and related birth defects resulting from alcohol use during pregnancy.

16. Avoid drinking if you are caring for children

They need you to respond effectively in emergencies.

17. Avoid drinking alcohol when you feel bad

It is much harder to control drinking when you are feeling angry, depressed, anxious, exhausted or bored. Cravings for alcohol are often triggered by physical or psychological discomfort and it is these emotions which are associated with relapse. If you have difficulty managing these emotions seek help.

18. Organise transport before going out

- Never drive to a drinking event; leave your car keys at home.
- Don't drink on impulse when your main means to get home is by driving.
- If you are out and have your car with you, keep your drinking to a minimum. If you do end up over the limit get a lift with a sober friend or get a taxi home. Don't drive your car.
- If you are planning to walk or use public transport it is better to travel with a friend for added safety.

It is safer to pre-plan the quantity of alcohol you need for the night to avoid driving intoxicated to the liquor store.

19. To prevent spiking, don't leave your drinks unattended

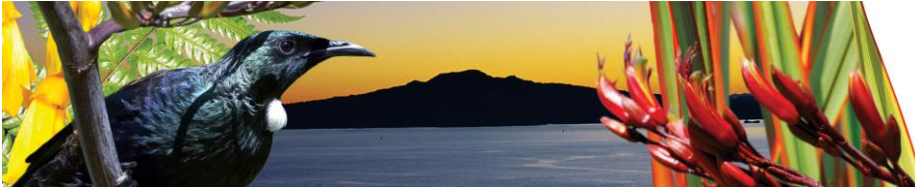
While it has been known for people's drinks to be 'spiked' with sedating drugs, the drug most commonly used to spike drinks is alcohol. More alcohol can be added to drinks without arousing suspicion; if someone else goes to the bar or is hosting they could add double or triple shots of spirits without the drinker realising they are consuming so much. A person who spikes a drink may be someone you know, an acquaintance, or a stranger.

20. Be aware of the drinks you have without even noticing

'Automatic' drinks are the drinks you have without thinking; the more automatic drinks you have the less likely you are to stay within the recommended standard drinks guidelines.

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21. Try a period of being alcohol-free

Some people find it helpful to abstain from drinking for a while; during this time you may become more aware of your triggers, the things that make you want to drink and of course you get to reduce any 'automatic' drinks.

- How long you do this for is up to you. Some people try for 30-days alcohol-free, some 90 days or more.
- Although you can do this at any time you might find it helpful to do it with others during things like Dry July or FebFast. Check out <http://nz.dryjuly.com/> and <http://www.febfast.org.nz> for more information. The other cool thing about these initiatives is that by going without alcohol, they raise money for charities.
- You might also like to look at Mrs D is Going Without at <http://livingwithoutalcohol.blogspot.co.nz/> for inspiration and support.

22. Get support

Change takes time. Having positive support can increase your ability to manage and reduce feelings of isolation, lack of confidence, shame and guilt. We know from experience and research that managing alcohol and other drug use is more successful with the support of friends and family. Getting information can be very helpful.

CADS – 09 815 1818 www.cads.org.nz are staff who specialise in alcohol and other drugs. They can support your decision to change the way you drink.

Recommended drinking guidelines

Please note that these drinking guidelines DO NOT relate to driving. After drinking these amounts you could easily be over the limit to drive safely.

Figures vary in range depending on the percentage of alcohol the person drinks.

These levels are based on a standard drink which contains 10 grams of alcohol.



Women

On any one DAY drink no more than 2 standard drinks.



Men

On any one DAY drink no more than 3 standard drinks.

Remember, there is no level of drinking that is safe for all people all the time and the Recommended Drinking Guidelines may be too high if you are:

- Driving/operating machinery/boating
- Taking medications including aspirin or any other drugs that irritate the stomach, such as steroids or anti-inflammatory drugs
- Suffering acute or chronic physical disease such as heart and lung disease, influenza, diabetes, epilepsy or acute infections.
- Recovering from an accident, injury or operation.

Health, age and weight directly affect how much it is safe for you to drink. For some, no alcohol is the only safe option, e.g., if you are pregnant. Research suggests the more alcohol people drink, the greater their risk of developing some cancers such as breast, liver and mouth cancers.

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