



Alcohol

Alcohol is commonly used in New Zealand. 80% of New Zealanders drank alcohol last year and for most there will have been no negative consequences.

For some people though drinking alcohol causes problems ranging from the occasional hangover to full scale dependence. Their health, relationships, and employment amongst other things get damaged. People get into legal and financial difficulties. People get hurt and some people die –from physical damage and health problems or from violence, car accidents and drowning.

Because of the number of people who drink alcohol, it causes more damage than any other drug used in NZ. About 10% of people who drink alcohol will become dependent; they come from all walks of life – doctors, lawyers, artists, farmers, retailers, unemployed. They are mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, sisters, brothers, cousins and neighbours. In other words, anyone can develop problems with alcohol.

What alcohol does

Alcohol is a Central Nervous System (CNS) depressant. This does not mean it makes us depressed (though it can); it means it slows brain activity so reduces our ability to function mentally and physically. People are affected differently depending on factors including:

- How much alcohol is consumed and how quickly
- A person’s body weight
- Gender: it takes women longer to process the same size drink
- Whether alcohol is consumed on a full or empty stomach
- Whether other drugs including medication have been used
- Whether a person has existing health issues.

Pregnant women, older people, and those who have previously had problems with alcohol and other drugs face additional risks. Plus there are particular risks associated with drinking and driving, operating machinery, being in or on water, as well as using alcohol to assist sleep (actually makes it worse) or to relieve stress or unhappiness.

So how much can I safely drink?

Long term health risks can be reduced by having at least 2 alcohol-free days every week and:

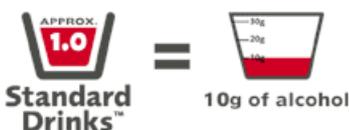
- 2 standard drinks a day for women and no more than 10 standard drinks a week
- 3 standard drinks a day for men and no more than 15 standard drinks a week.

For young people under 18 years, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

- Those under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking alcohol and not drinking in this age group is especially important.
- For young people aged 15 to 17 years, the safest option is to delay drinking for as long as possible.

Please note: these guidelines DO NOT relate to driving. We recommend that drivers aged under 20 do not drink at all as the legal limit is effectively zero for them.

What is a standard drink?



A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

It is important to note that drink serving sizes are often more than one standard drink.

Look on the bottle or can to find the number of standard drinks it contains.

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When alcohol becomes a problem

Nearly 20% of people who drank alcohol last year had “hazardous drinking patterns”. In other words they drank more than is safe, lost control and experienced blackouts and hangovers along with other problems.

People who do this can change the way they drink, reducing or better still eliminating the harms or problems they cause themselves and others. This usually involves purposefully changing how often and how much they drink (controlled drinking), avoiding people and places which lead to problems, and developing better coping skills to deal with life’s stresses.

Tolerance and dependence

When you’re using alcohol or other drugs your body (and mind) gets used to it and you need to take more to get the desired effect. In other words you become tolerant to a certain amount.

When people become dependent on alcohol their thoughts feelings and emotions revolve around alcohol to the exclusion of most other things and they experience withdrawal symptoms if they stop drinking.

You don’t have to be drinking secretly to be alcohol dependent. Many people continue to work and on the surface at least appear to be functioning well. If someone is drinking dependently then it is highly unlikely that a return to controlled drinking will be possible. For most people the best option is to go completely alcohol-free.

It can take time to become ready to face up to the difficulties alcohol is causing. Making change is never easy; maintaining the change is even harder so there may be several attempts. This is quite normal.

Pregnancy

There is no known safe level of alcohol use at any stage of pregnancy. Advice for pregnant women or those planning to get pregnant is to avoid alcohol.

Binge drinking is linked to increased risk of stillbirth and regular drinking (having five or more drinks per week on a regular basis) during pregnancy is linked to miscarriages.

Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) which is an umbrella term used to describe a range of adverse effects on foetal development when alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. No one knows exactly what the threshold is for causing the disorder so it is safest to avoid alcohol while pregnant.

Looking for help?

If you’re just looking for information or maybe want to talk with someone about an alcohol issue for yourself or someone close to you then give [Auckland CADS](#) a call on **845 1818**

Other services

Alcohol drug helpline: Phone 0800 787 797 (10am-10pm daily)

Health Promotion Agency: The HPA took over all functions previously undertaken by the Alcohol Advisory Council (ALAC) in 2012. For information on standard drinks, the law, alcohol and your kids, or to see if your drinking’s ok go to www.alcohol.org.nz/alcohol-you

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a self-help fellowship for people who are experiencing or who have experienced problems with alcohol. Phone 09 366 6688 or 0800 229 675 or look at www.aa-auckland.org.nz

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