

# ALCOHOL

and later life

Issue 1 - Autumn 2014



Alcohol Effects  
As We Get Older

Alcohol and  
Medication

Alcohol and  
Nutrition



## Introduction

Alcohol has an important but complicated place in Scottish culture as part of many people's social lives and celebrations and also as part of the economy through industry and tourism. There are many positive things about drinking safely as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Around 90% of adults in Scotland drink alcohol and many of them do so with little risk to their health. However as we get older, our bodies change and the effects of alcohol can become more harmful.

### So what does that mean for older adults?

There are key factors that may contribute to alcohol playing a bigger part in our lives as we get older due to significant changes in life circumstances. These can include bereavement, children moving out of home and a general change in the pace of life as we age.

### Why does the advice change as we get older?

Our bodies change physically as we get older and this affects our metabolism. This means that the way our bodies process alcohol alters and the body works less efficiently than it used to. As a result, the recommended guidelines for alcohol are too high as we get older.

### Government guidelines recommend that:

- Adult women over 18 should drink no more than 2-3 units per day
- Adult men over 18 should drink no more than 3-4 units per day
- Everyone should have at least 2 alcohol free days per week
- It is recommended that young people under 18 do not drink alcohol

However, there is new evidence to suggest that adults over the age of 65 should drink no more than 1.5 units per day.

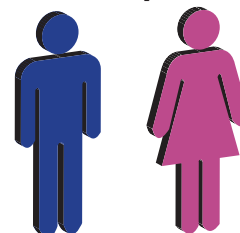
### So what is a unit of alcohol?

- The number of units in a drink depends on the strength of the alcohol and the amount

### One drink does not equal one unit

	• Large (250ml) glass of wine (13.5%) <b>3.4 units</b>
	• Pint of beer, lager or cider (5%) <b>2.9 units</b>
	• Pub measure (35ml) of spirits (40%) <b>1.4 units</b>

1.5 units per day



Drinks poured at home are often larger than pub measures so you can easily drink more than you might be aware of. Think about using a drinks measure at home.



## Alcohol and Your Medicines

People who take medicines have to be particularly careful as alcohol can seriously interfere with their effects. This is true whether they are bought from a pharmacy, a shop (including herbal remedies) or are prescribed by your G.P. Often when people are under the influence of alcohol they can forget when to take their medicines or not take the correct dose.

### Look carefully at the labels on your medicines

Your prescribed medicines will be labelled with directions on how to take/use them. If appropriate this label will also contain any relevant warnings.



**Remember:** Some preparations contain a combination of drugs. For example co-codamol contains paracetamol and codeine (both contained in the table below). Cough and cold remedies also contain a combination of drugs to treat symptoms. Generally alcohol should be avoided with the night time/drowsy preparations e.g. Night Nurse®, Benylin Original®, Benylin Mucus Cough Night®, Covonia Night Time Formula®. If in doubt ask your pharmacist or GP.





*Since my husband passed away I started to drink a lot because I felt lonely.*

*I realised I was drinking more after a chat with my G.P. He encouraged me to get out of the house more so I joined a local community group.*

*Since then I have met new people and am making all sort of new plans.*



The table below lists some common types of medicines and explains some of the possible risks of mixing them with alcohol.

Types of Medicine	Advice/Possible Risks
 <p><b>Painkillers e.g.</b> paracetamol. - <b>also see Morphine related painkillers on the opposite page</b></p>	<p>(The interaction of alcohol and medicines can be unpredictable)</p> <p>Paracetamol and alcohol are both broken down by the liver, therefore your liver has to work harder if you take them together. Never take more than the recommended dose of paracetamol.</p>
 <p><b>Anti-Inflammatory Drugs e.g.</b> ibuprofen, aspirin.</p>	<p>These medicines can irritate the stomach, the same as alcohol and people who drink on a regular basis are more likely to suffer from heartburn and stomach ulcers. These drugs can also thin the blood therefore increasing the risk of bleeding.</p>
 <p><b>Blood thinning medicines e.g.</b> warfarin.</p>	<p>Pay particular attention to your daily units. It is dangerous to drink over the recommended limits or get drunk while taking warfarin. Doing this may increase the risk of bleeding.</p>
 <p><b>Stomach healing medicines e.g.</b> omeprazole, lansoprazole, ranitidine.</p>	<p>People who drink regularly are more likely to suffer from heartburn and stomach ulcers. As alcohol irritates the stomach lining, drinking it will reduce the effectiveness of these medicines.</p>



## Types of Medicine



### Antihistamines

Even non-drowsy preparations, although extra care should be taken with drowsy antihistamines e.g. Nytol®, promethazine, chlorpheniramine, hydroxyzine.

### Morphine related pain killers

e.g. codeine, morphine, oxycodone, dihydrocodeine, tramadol.

### Opioid substitution therapy

e.g. methadone, Suboxone®, Subutex®.

### Tranquilisers/ Sleeping Tablets

e.g. diazepam, temazepam, nitrazepam, lorazepam, zopiclone, zolpidem.

## Advice/Possible Risks

(The interaction of alcohol and medicines can be unpredictable)

All these medicines have the potential to make you drowsy when taken alone, therefore when taken with alcohol these effects can be worse. Possible effects are:

- Feeling very drowsy
- Your memory may be affected
- Feeling dizzy
- Slowed or difficulty breathing which can be fatal.

N.B. Tranquilisers are often used to treat feelings of anxiety, remember alcohol can cause feelings of anxiety, especially the following day.



### Mental Health Medicines

e.g. amitriptyline, doxepin, lofepramine, mirtazapine, trazodone, lithium, chlorpromazine, flupentixol, olanzapine, quetiapine. N.B. Phenelzine.

- Feeling more drowsy
- Poor co-ordination
- Low blood pressure, dizziness, fainting
- Remember alcohol can often exaggerate whatever mood you're in when you start drinking and make you feel anxious
- Alcoholic drinks should be avoided, especially those containing tyramine (red wine & beers) as there is a risk of a dangerous rise in blood pressure.



## Medicines for diabetes

e.g. insulin, metformin, gliclazide.

Alcohol can affect people in different ways so, if in doubt, test your blood sugar to see how alcohol affects you. Alcohol can cause low blood sugar. This is further complicated when you are prescribed medications to lower your blood sugar, like in diabetes. People with diabetes should therefore take extra care when drinking alcohol. Drinking on an empty stomach will further increase the risk of low blood sugar.



## Antibiotics

e.g. penicillin, linezolid, co-trimoxazole, erythromycin, metronidazole, tinidazole.

Some antibiotics can upset your stomach and make you feel sleepy and dizzy, which might be made worse by drinking alcohol.

These can sometimes react with alcohol and therefore it is best avoided.

A potentially severe reaction including nausea, vomiting, headache, and flushing can occur.



## Medicines for epilepsy

e.g. carbamazepine, phenobarbital, phenytoin, sodium valproate, levetiracetam.

Alcohol can reduce the effectiveness of these medicines, as it is known to increase the risk of fits. Drowsiness can also be increased.



## Medicines for the heart

e.g. for your blood pressure, to prevent angina, to reduce cardiac risk.

Alcohol can affect your blood pressure, making you feel dizzy and faint especially if you are on medications to lower your blood pressure.

Drinking above the recommended limits regularly can contribute to high blood pressure.

**Always follow the instructions on your medications.**

**Remember this list is not exhaustive. If you have any queries about your medication and the statements above, ask your local pharmacist or your GP.**



## Alcohol, Food and the Body

Alcohol and how it can affect your digestive system is shown in the table below:

Organ	Function	Affects of alcohol and nutrition	Symptoms that can result
<b>Liver</b>	Processes toxins e.g. alcohol. Stores vitamins. Stores energy.	Damages the liver and reduces its ability to store vitamins or energy	Tiredness, change in appetite, weight changes, vitamin deficiencies, fatty stools
<b>Pancreas</b>	Breaks down food for absorption.	Damages the pancreas and can cause inflammation and reduced absorption of fat, energy, vitamins and minerals	Frequent fatty stools, pain, vitamin deficiencies, diabetes
<b>Bowel</b>	Absorbs nutrients and water.	Can cause inflammation and reduced absorption of nutrients e.g. iron	Dehydration, anaemia, vitamin deficiencies, diarrhoea

Another part of the body which can be affected by drinking more than the recommended limits of alcohol is the brain. Due to the reduced absorption of vitamins, an important vitamin called thiamine (also known as vitamin B1) may not get absorbed as well, which can lead to nerve damage and memory loss. So if you are drinking more than recommended it is important you get a daily supply of thiamine rich foods such as:

- Yeast or beef extract e.g. Bovril, Marmite, Vegemite
- Pork products e.g. bacon, ham, gammon • Baked beans or kidney beans
- Soup • Baked potato or chips with the skin • Bread or rolls • Breakfast cereals
- Nuts and dried fruit • Fruits and vegetables



**Remember:** Alcohol can be enjoyed as part of a balanced diet when taken within the recommended limits. It is good to enjoy your food and drink including the social aspect of sitting down to a meal with friends or family when the opportunity arises. However it is important to remember that alcohol can have an ill effect on the body if taken every day and in larger volumes than recommended, especially on the digestive system.



## Alcohol, Food and the Body

Some people worry that drinking alcohol will increase their weight, however if taken within recommended limits as part of a balanced diet this shouldn't be the case. Alcohol lowers our blood sugar levels which can stimulate our appetite and result in unhealthy food choices, especially late at night, leading to over eating and weight gain. However to reduce the effects of alcohol on the body and on our weight don't drink alcohol on an empty stomach.

Alcohol contains "empty calories" which means it provides the body with no nutritional benefit. Food provides us with essential protein, fat, vitamins and minerals needed for the body to work which the alcohol does not provide.

Eating a good diet is needed to help provide energy to help keep you fit and healthy and repair possible damage caused to the body. Think of it like this, what happens when you don't put petrol in a car? It does not start or go anywhere! This is the same analogy as our bodies with food.







## Here are some tips to ensure you are fuelling your body correctly:

Food Group	What foods does it include?	What are the nutritional benefits?	How much should I take?
<b>Carbohydrates</b>	Bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, couscous, noodles, oats, cereals	Provide the body with energy, fibre, vitamins	With every meal
<b>Protein</b>	Meat, fish, chicken, beans, lentils, eggs, tofu	Growth and repair of muscles, hair, nails, skin	2 portions per day
<b>Fat and sugar</b>	Biscuits, crisps, sweets, cakes, ice cream, butter, margarine, sugary drinks	Insulation, storage of vitamins.	If trying to lose weight limit this food group as much as possible. If trying to gain weight try to increase high calorie snacks.
<b>Milk and dairy</b>	Milk, yogurt, cheese, butter	Provides Calcium for healthy bones and teeth	2-3 portions per day
<b>Vitamins and minerals</b>	Fruit & vegetables contain a high amount of vitamins, however most foods contain a few vitamins or minerals.	Healthy hair and skin. Help provides energy. Good for immune system at fighting colds and infections.	Recommend 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, however if this is too much try to have 1 piece of fruit and 1 vegetable per day.
<b>Drinks</b>	Milk, water, fruit juice, squash, tea, coffee	Helps to keep the body hydrated. Helps to maintain healthy bowels. Good for concentration.	6-8 glasses per day
<b>Alcohol</b>	Beer, wine, spirits, etc	None	Recommended limits: for women 2 -3 units per day, eg 1 glass of wine; for men 3-4 units per day, eg 1½ pints of beer.



As they get older some people may feel their appetite is not as good as it once was. If this has happened try to eat smaller portions at meals and snack more regularly e.g. 3 small meals and 3 small snacks. Also try to have a glass of milk with your meals. If you are concerned about your appetite or you have lost weight unintentionally discuss this with your GP.

## Here are some meal ideas to try



### Breakfast

- 2 slice of toast or English muffin topped with scrambled, boiled or poached eggs with tomato
- 2 slices of toast with either spread, jam, peanut butter or banana
- Grilled bacon on a wholemeal roll
- Wholegrain cereal with fruit & milk
- Porridge with blueberries and milk



### Lunch

- Bowl of soup with a roll
- Cold meat and salad sandwich
- Cheese and ham toastie
- Baked potato with baked beans/chilli/cheese or coleslaw
- French toast with baked beans
- Oatcakes with spreading cheese and cherry tomatoes



### Evening Meals

- Breaded fish and potatoes or oven chips with peas and carrots
- Sausage casserole with sweet potato and vegetables
- Beef lasagne with salad
- Salmon with butternut squash or peas and potatoes
- Vegetarian risotto
- Cheese and tomato omelette
- Chicken or prawn or vegetable curry with rice or noodles
- Mince and potatoes with vegetables
- Roast chicken with brussel sprouts, parsnips and potato
- (NB: these meals can be homemade or readymade for convenience)



### Snacks

- Piece of fruit
- Handful of dried fruit
- Vegetable sticks
- Bread sticks and dip
- Yogurt
- Pancake
- 2-3 crackers
- Rice cakes and cheese
- Small packet of crisps
- 2 plain biscuits
- Handful of nuts

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Wine 13.5%  
sparkling, red,  
white, rose



**We are living longer and it is important to stay as healthy as we can. Please find below some points that may be of interest.**

If having an alcoholic drink make sure you have a meal or substantial snack before hand and have alcohol within the recommended limits.

While a glass of wine after a hard day might help you relax, in the long run it can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and make stress harder to deal with. ([drinkaware.co.uk](http://drinkaware.co.uk))

Something to note for those chilly winter nights (or any night in Scotland).....Alcohol can make you feel warm as it causes a rosy glow but this makes you lose heat, increasing the risk of hypothermia. Falls are also more likely during cold spells especially when alcohol has been consumed.

Alcohol can be a factor in cancers, heart problems, high blood pressure, stroke, liver disease and falls and other accidents.

Alcohol may help you nod off but even a few drinks will affect the quality of your sleep, making you tired the next day.

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**If you need more information please see services listed below:**

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**Glasgow Council on Alcohol (GCA)**

0141 353 1800

**Glasgow Alcohol Behaviour Change  
(ABC) Service**

08081785901

**Greater Easterhouse Alcohol Awareness  
Project (GEAAP)**

0141 773 1222

**Dumbarton Area Council on Alcohol  
(DACA)**

Clydebank 0141 952 0881

Dumbarton 01389 731456

**Renfrewshire Integrated Alcohol Team**

0141 889 1223

**Inverclyde Integrated Alcohol Service**

01475 715 353

**East Dunbartonshire Alcohol &  
Drugs Service**

0141 232 8226

**East Renfrewshire Community  
Addiction Team**

0141 577 3368

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)**

24hr Helpline 0845 769 7555

0141 226 2214

**Al-Anon/Alateen**

(for families of problem drinkers)

0141 339 8884

**Drink Smarter**

0800 7 314 314

**Citizens Advice Direct**

Telephone Advice 0808 800 9060

**Glasgow Older Persons Welfare**

0141 221 9924

If you already link with services please speak to your G.P, CPN, Pharmacist, Practice Nurse or Health and Social Care Practitioner if concerned about your drinking.

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**\* This magazine is not to be used as direct medical advice,  
always contact your G.P for advice and information.**

