

## What is harm reduction?

Harm reduction is an approach which aims to reduce the risks when drinking alcohol or using other drugs and encourages safer behaviours. Harm reduction recognises that some people will continue to consume alcohol regardless of the risks. However, there are strategies that can be used to help lower the risk of harm when drinking alcohol.

## What is alcohol? (Also called booze, grog, liquor)

Alcohol is a depressant drug which means that it slows down the functioning of the brain and the body (e.g. slows down heart rate and breathing). Alcohol is the most commonly used drug in Australia.

## Alcohol - Onset and duration of effects

Alcohol affects people differently. The effects can depend on a lot of things, including what you drink, how much you drink, how quickly you drink it, your size and weight and whether you are male or female. Consuming alcohol with over the counter, prescribed medications and other drugs can increase the risk of an overdose.

When drinking alcohol the onset of effects usually starts within 15-30 minutes and peaks after 30-90 minutes. Depending on the amount consumed and tolerance the effects can last for between 3-6 hours. The effects from a hangover can last for up to 36 hours and it takes an adult approximately 1 hour to process 1 standard drink.

## Looking after yourself

It is important to know that drinking alcohol is never completely safe but there are strategies that you can use to reduce the harm. Alcohol use can cause harm to your mental or physical health, relationships and finances. Alcohol can also impact on your ability to work, study, or care for people. Here are some strategies that can be used to help lower the risks.

- **Set limits.** Setting a limit on when and how much alcohol you consume can help keep your drinking under control and reduces your risk of developing dependence. Having alcohol free days each week also gives your brain and body time to recover and the more you break up the pattern of use, the easier it is to manage your use.
- **Please note:** Withdrawing from alcohol without medical supervision can be life-threatening. If you are dependent on alcohol, it is recommended that medical advice be sought before stopping use.
- **Count your drinks.** Counting the number of standard drinks is the easiest way to keep track of how much alcohol you are drinking. One standard drink contains 10 grams or one unit of pure alcohol. The label on the bottle or the pack shows the number of standard drinks it contains. **Healthy adults** should drink no more than **10 standard drinks** in a week, and no more than **4 standard drinks** on any one day.
- **Delay.** Try delaying when you have your first drink of the day. It can be helpful to distract yourself e.g., talk to a friend, eat, go for a walk, or complete certain jobs/activities before you start drinking.
- **Don't mix.** Mixing alcohol with over-the-counter/prescribed medications or other drugs increases the risk of harm. Mixing or combining alcohol with other depressant drugs such as opioids or benzodiazepines also increases the risk of overdose.
- **Don't drink alone.** There are risks when drinking alone. It's always better to be in a safe environment and with people you trust if something does go wrong. It's also important that if anyone becomes unwell to stay with them and don't let them go off alone.
- **Drink a low-alcohol or no-alcohol drink.** Choosing a low-alcohol drink can be a helpful way to cut down. You may also like to try swapping your usual drink with alcohol-free alternatives. There are now a range of alcohol-free beers, ciders, wines, and spirits widely available.
- **Eat first.** Have something to eat before you drink and while drinking. This will slow down the alcohol being absorbed into your bloodstream and help you pace yourself.

- **Monitor your moods and emotions.** Alcohol use can impact your mental health. Some long term mental health effects linked to alcohol use include decreased motivation, mood swings, depression and anxiety, all of which increase the risk of self-harm and suicide.
- **Be prepared and careful.** Alcohol can impact your decision-making and risky things can become more risky. Some common things to plan for can be your transport home to avoid drink driving, having your phone charged with credit, and being prepared for safe sex.
- **Don't drive.** Alcohol affects your ability to drive safely (this also includes riding a bike or scooter). It is against the law to drive or be in charge of a motor vehicle if your blood/breath alcohol concentration (BAC) is 0.05 or more. For some drivers, their BAC must be zero (0) to legally drive.
- **Adopt a healthy and balanced lifestyle.** If you are drinking alcohol remember to stay hydrated, eat well, sleep and exercise. It's also important to find a balance between work, study, play and rest.
- **Caring for yourself.** If you are drinking regularly, taking thiamine (vitamin B1) supplements can reduce the risk of brain damage. It can also be helpful to have regular check-ups with your GP to monitor your health.
- **Caring for others.** Alcohol use can affect your children and others around you. Ensure your children remain safe and supervised at all times. Make a plan prior to drinking and be prepared for the hangover in advance.

**Please Note:** Sleeping with a child in the same bed while under the influence of alcohol or other drugs can be particularly dangerous.

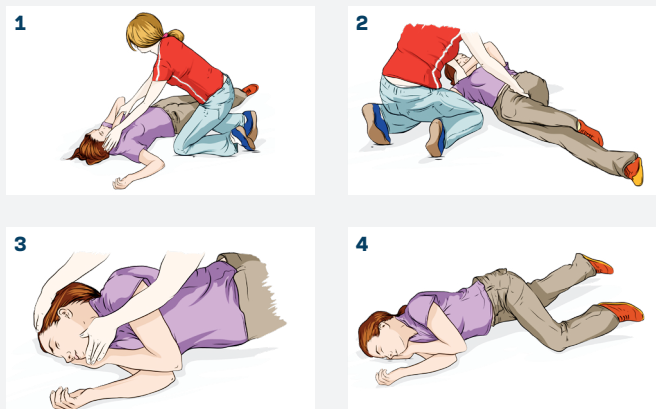
## What help is available?

Adis 24/7 Alcohol and Drug Support is a 24 hour, 7 day a week confidential support service for people in Queensland with alcohol and other drug concerns, their families and health professionals.

**Talk to us. Anytime, anywhere.**  
**1800 177 833**

## What should I do in an emergency?

If someone has collapsed or lost consciousness, call an ambulance on **triple zero (000)**. If they have stopped breathing commence CPR. If they are breathing normally, place them into the recovery position and continue to monitor them until the ambulance arrives.



## Disclaimer

This factsheet does not accept, condone or promote the use of alcohol or other drugs. While most people who drink alcohol do not suffer serious harms, the use of any drug, whether legal or not, always carries some risk. No amount of planning and care can ensure that you will have a 'risk free' experience when consuming alcohol and the best way to avoid potential harms is to not drink alcohol. By developing this factsheet we are not suggesting that alcohol use is safe.