

AT EASE
RECOGNISE > ACT > MAINTAIN

THE RIGHT MIX

Your Health and Alcohol

Alcohol is widely used and enjoyed by many Australians as part of our culture, tradition and celebrations.

For some veterans, it was part of their military experience. For most veterans who drink at low-risk levels, alcohol is just part of the mix in a healthy lifestyle that includes good diet and regular exercise.

This brochure can help you or someone you know to find the right mix.

What's the right mix for you?

Choosing a balanced diet, regular exercise and not smoking is a smart choice for a healthy mix.

Together with maintaining low-risk drinking, you can find the right mix that may help you to:

- Feel healthier
- Lose weight
- Reduce the risk to your heart, liver and brain
- Prevent high blood pressure
- Get on better with your family
- Reduce the risk of alcohol related accidents
- Perform better in your daily activities

Anxious & Moody?

If you're suffering from anxiety, depression or PTSD, alcohol may appear to bring some relief from anxiety or stress in the short-term. But it can make things worse in the longer term.

Work out your mix

The effects of alcohol depend on your age, your body size; your level of fitness; the state of your liver and whether you are a man or a woman. Your reaction to alcohol also depends on what medicines you are taking and how recently you've eaten.

It's not safe to 'save up' your drinks for a couple of days and then have a binge. Binge drinking can be harmful to your health, even if you don't drink very often.

One Drink Isn't Always One Drink

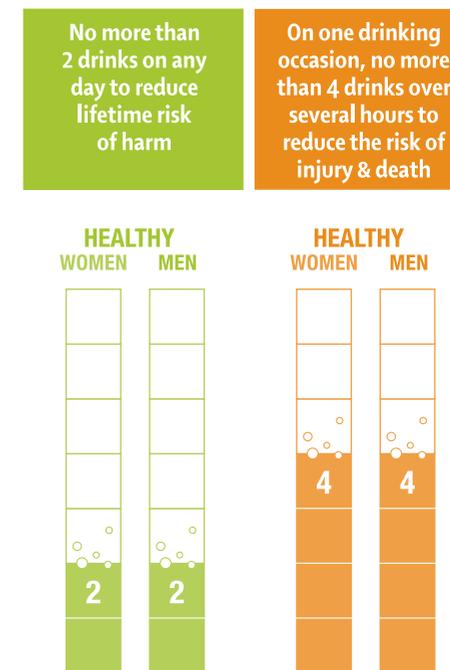
All alcohol products state the number of standard drinks on the container.

Standard Drink Guide



Is my drinking low-risk?

How do you line up against these drinking guidelines?*



*Australian Guidelines To Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009.

To reduce health risks:

- On any day, no more than 2 standard drinks for both men and women will significantly reduce your lifetime risk of harm from an alcohol related disease or injury
- Have regular alcohol-free days each week.

To reduce the risk of injury & death from one drinking occasion:

- No more than 4 standard drinks on any one occasion
- These drinks should be spread over several hours.

How do I interpret these guidelines?

When drinking it is best to not exceed 2 drinks a day on a regular basis (and regular alcohol-free days are desirable). However, on special occasions when you might wish to drink a little more,

drinking no more than 4 drinks will significantly reduce your chances of injury resulting from that drinking occasion. The guidelines are the same for men and women because men are at greater risk of injury from high-risk behaviours when drinking and females are at greater risk of physical damage from equivalent amounts of alcohol. However, women who are planning to get pregnant, or who are pregnant or are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option. It is recommended that young people under the age of 15 not drink and those between the age of 15 and 17 delay drinking for as long as possible, but if drinking to do so under adult supervision in a low-risk environment and within the guideline limits.

Sleep

Alcohol might knock you out for a few hours, but it usually causes a disrupted sleep, early morning waking or insomnia. This may cause anxiety and stress that leads to more drinking.

Short Fuse?

Alcohol and anger are a dangerous mix. Alcohol just makes the angry outbursts with your family, yourself or the world, worse.

Why change the mix?

Drinking above the low-risk levels can affect you and your family. Take particular care with alcohol if:

- You have heart disease, high blood pressure or are gaining weight
- You are on medication or other drugs
- You have a physical health or social problem made worse by alcohol
- You experience depression, anxiety or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Medication

Alcohol can have harmful effects when combined with medication. Your medication may not work as well, or not at all, if you drink. Alcohol can be particularly dangerous when used with other drugs that have similar effects, such as sleeping pills and anti-depressants. You should talk to your doctor or pharmacist about the possible effects of alcohol on your medication.

Want a healthier mix?

You can change the mix yourself to get a balance of healthy diet, regular exercise and low-risk drinking.

As a first step, think about changing your drinking habits:

- Don't drink on an empty stomach—eat before and during drinking
- Set a limit to your drinking time and the amount that you wish to spend on alcohol
- Start with a juice or soft drink to quench your thirst
- Choose light beer or other low-alcohol drinks and don't mix alcohol with energy (high caffeine) drinks
- Drink slowly and don't top up drinks
- Refill your own glass
- Count your standard drinks
- Have water or other drinks in between alcoholic drinks
- Drink at the pace of someone who drinks less than you
- Do something else while you drink—have a meal; play a game of pool or cards
- Have regular alcohol free days each week

Alcohol and Ageing

As you get older, your body doesn't handle alcohol like it used to. You've got less water in your body to absorb the alcohol, so more alcohol stays in your bloodstream, affecting you faster than it used to.

You can change your mix

- Have you ever thought you drink too much?
- Has a friend, relative or doctor ever been concerned about your drinking?
- Do you regularly have more than four drinks on any one occasion?
- Do you drink to cope with anger, stress and sleeplessness?
- Have you tried to cut down or stop drinking without success?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, your next step is to think about your choices and take action.

Take action

Talk to your doctor or other health professional about your health and alcohol

Ask for more information or speak to a VVCS Counsellor** on:

NATIONAL 1800 011 046

Assess your drinking patterns and get more information at

www.therightmix.gov.au

**VVCS – Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service is available for all Australian veterans and their families.

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