

ALCOHOL

and later life



Alcohol Effects
As We Get Older

Alcohol and
Medication

Alcohol and
Nutrition

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



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 sensibly as part of a healthy lifestyle. 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.

Government low risk drinking guidelines recommend that:



To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level it is safest to drink no more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. If you regularly drink up to 14 units in a week it is best to spread this across 3 days.

However, there is evidence to suggest that adults, both male and female, over the age of 65 should drink no more than 1.5 units per day. As a result, the recommended guidelines for alcohol are too high as we get older.

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

Wine 13.5%
sparkling, red, white, rose, champagne
250ml

- Large (250ml) glass of wine (13.5%)
= 3.4 units

Beer 5%
Heineken, Budweiser, Becks, Stella Artois
568ml Pint

- Pint of beer, lager or cider (5%)
= 2.8 units

Spirits 40%
Vodka, Gin, Whisky, Rum
25ml

- Pub measure (25ml) of spirits (40%)
= 1 unit

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.

Always follow the instructions on your medications. Remember this list is not exhaustive. If you have any queries about your medication and the statements below, ask your local pharmacist or your GP.

Types of Medicine	Advice/Possible Risks (The interaction of alcohol and medicines can be unpredictable)
 <p>Painkillers e.g. paracetamol. - also see Morphine related painkillers on the opposite page</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>Anti-Inflammatory Drugs e.g. 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>Blood thinning medicines e.g. 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>Stomach healing medicines e.g. 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. Phenezine.

- 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
- Alcohol drinks containing "tyrosine" (found in red wine and beers) should be avoided if you are taking an anti-depressant which is called a mono-amine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) - for example Phenezine - as these drinks can react with the medicine to cause 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.

With certain antibiotics like metronidazole and tinidazole, 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
Liver	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
Pancreas	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
Bowel	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.



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Beer
5%



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?
Carbohydrates	Bread, rice, pasta, potatoes, couscous, noodles, oats, cereals	Provide the body with energy, fibre, vitamins	With every meal
Protein	Meat, fish, chicken, beans, lentils, eggs, tofu	Growth and repair of muscles, hair, nails, skin	2 portions per day
Fat and sugar	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.
Milk and dairy	Milk, yogurt, cheese, butter	Provides Calcium for healthy bones and teeth	2-3 portions per day
Vitamins and minerals	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.
Drinks	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
Alcohol	Beer, wine, spirits, etc	None	Low risk drinking guidelines for males and females over 18 years advise that it is safest to drink no more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. If you do regularly drink up to 14 units in a week, it is best to spread this across 3 or more days. Evidence suggests that adults over the age of 65 should drink no more than 1.5 units per day.



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

Wine
13.5%



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)

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.

You may wish to discuss your alcohol intake with your GP at your next visit.

Visit www.nhsgrampian.org/alcohol for links to all three Alcohol & Drug Partnership websites across Grampian with info on services available locally and downloadable leaflets.

Aberdeen

Alcohol Aberdeen

Tel: 01224 594700 (helpline open daily)

Aberdeenshire

Self request or professional referral

Drop in times and places below or for further information, support or advice contact Alcohol and Drugs Service on 01224 594700.

North Aberdeenshire

nhsg.kessockclinic@nhs.net

South Central Aberdeenshire

nhsg.grampianspa@nhs.net

Banchory

Lesser Hall (Town Hall)
Tuesday, 11am - 4pm

Banff

83 North Castle Street
Thursday and Friday - 10am to 4pm

Fraserburgh

Here For You Centre
Monday and Thursday - 10am to 12 noon

JIC Centre

Wednesday - 2.30pm to 3.30pm

Huntly

Largue's Pharmacy
Thursday - 9.30am to 12 noon

Linden Centre

Thursday - 1pm to 5pm

Inverurie

Will's Pharmacy, W High Street
Friday - 9.30am to 1pm

Garioch Community Centre

Friday - 2pm to 4pm

Peterhead

9 St Peter Street
Monday, Wednesday and Thursday - 9am to 5pm
Tuesday - 9am to 7pm
Friday - 9am to 4.30pm

Stonehaven

Community Centre
Wednesday - 9am to 4.30pm.

Moray

Arrows Service

Tel: 01343 552382

Helpline: 07812 228547

For free confidential advice on alcohol and how to cut down contact:

Drinkline

Tel: 0800 731 4314 (8am - 11pm, 7 days a week)

For peer support for recovery from alcohol dependency. Various meeting times / locations across Grampian. Please visit ADP websites for local support groups.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Tel: 0845 769 755 (24 hour helpline)

In addition to the local services, support for families and friends of people affected by alcohol or drugs misuse (this also includes bereavement) is available from:

Al-Anon (for families of problem drinkers)

Tel: 0207 403 0888

Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD)

Tel: 0808 010 011

If you are experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety contact:

Breathing Space

Tel: 0800 83 85 87

This publication is also available in large print and on computer disk. Other formats and languages can be supplied on request.

Please call Equality and Diversity on 01224 551116 or 01224 552245 or email grampian@nhs.net