

**STEPS primary care mental health team,  
Glasgow**

---

# **Alcohol and Sensible Drinking**

**Sandra Johnston**

---

©Sandra Johnston (2005). All rights reserved. Do not amend in any way.

This booklet is for people who would like to cut down on their drinking. It is not meant for people who feel that they are alcoholics.

## **PART ONE: ASSESS YOUR DRINKING**

Benefits of Drink

How many units in your drink?

The effects of drinking too much

Are you drinking too much?

## **PART TWO: WHAT DRINK DOES TO YOU**

Quotes

How drink can affect your life

Drinking myths

## **PART THREE: CONTROL YOUR DRINKING**

How to get a grip on problem drinking

## **PART FOUR: GETTING HELP**

# **PART ONE**

## **ASSESS YOUR DRINKING**

Benefits of Drink

What are the safe limits of alcohol drinking?

How many units in you drink.

Lets see if you are drinking too much

## **Benefits of Drink**

Drink can be a good thing as long as you drink in a way that does you no harm. It makes us more chatty and friendly. It helps us to loosen up and enjoy being with others. We use it to relax, have a laugh or to help us enjoy events such as weddings and births. Most people who drink take amounts that are not likely to cause them any harm.

## **What are the safe limits of alcohol drinking?**

**Men** should drink no more than 21 units of alcohol per week (and no more than 4 units in one day). A unit of alcohol is a half pint of lager, a pub measure of spirits or a standard glass of wine (75ml). Some beers and lagers are stronger, which means they are more than roughly 5% alcohol. These are the so called super lagers.

**Women** should drink no more than 14 units of alcohol per week (and no more than 3 units in one day).

**Pregnant Women.** If you have one or two drinks of alcohol (one or two units), once or twice per week, the chances are it won't harm your unborn baby. The exact amount that is safe is not known. So many women have little or no alcohol when they are pregnant.

## **The Effect of Drinking too much**

Drinking above the safe limit can harm your health and well being. About 1 in 4 men and 1 in 7 women, drink more than the safe levels. For lots of reasons, many people have got into the habit of drinking often and heavily. But drinking heavily is a real health worry.

Even if you stick to the safe limit, you could be causing problems to your mood and health especially if you drink most of the units in one go. You will be more likely to get into fights and you will be more likely to hurt yourself. This can cause you to have problems with family and at work etc.

Remember that if you drink at home you are more likely to pour doubles for yourself or larger measures.

## How many units in your drink?

1 pub measure of spirits (whisky, gin, vodka)	<b>1</b>
1 pub measure of fortified wine (sherry, martini, port)	<b>1</b>
1 glass of table wine	<b>1</b>
1 glass or can of alcoholic lemonade( alcopop)	<b>2</b>
1 can of low alcohol beer	<b>1</b>
1 can of lager	<b>2</b>
1 can of beer	<b>1.5</b>
1 bottle of super or special lager	<b>2.5</b>
1 pint of stout, real ale or strong lager	<b>3</b>
1 can of super or special lager	<b>4</b>
1 bottle of table wine	<b>7</b>
1 litre bottle of table wine	<b>10</b>
1 bottle of fortified wine (sherry, martini, port)	<b>14</b>
1 bottle of spirits(whisky, gin, vodka)	<b>30</b>

# Let's see if you are drinking too much

Try filling in this simple list of questions below to find out if you have an alcohol problem.

## 1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

Never (0)	Monthly or less (1)	2 to 4 times a month (2)	2 to 3 times a week (3)	4 or more times a week (4)
--------------	------------------------	-----------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------

## 2. How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?

1 or 2 (0)	3 or 4 (1)	5 or 6 (2)	7 to 9 (3)	10 or more (4)
---------------	---------------	---------------	---------------	-------------------

## 3. How often do you have 6 or more drinks on one occasion?

Never (0)	less than monthly (1)	Monthly (2)	Weekly (3)	10 or more (4)
--------------	--------------------------	----------------	---------------	-------------------

**4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?**

Never	Less than monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)

**5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?**

Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

**6. How often during the past year have you needed a drink first thing in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?**

Never	Less than Monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
(0)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)

**7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?**

Never (0)	Less than Monthly (1)	Monthly (2)	Weekly (3)	Daily or almost daily (4)
--------------	--------------------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------------

**8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?**

Never (0)	Less than monthly (1)	Monthly (2)	Weekly (3)	Daily or almost daily (4)
--------------	--------------------------	----------------	---------------	------------------------------

**9. Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?**

No (0)	Yes but not in the last year (1)	Yes during the last year (2)
-----------	-------------------------------------	---------------------------------

**10. Has a relative or friend or doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?**

No (0)	Yes but not in the last year (1)	Yes during the last year (2)
-----------	-------------------------------------	---------------------------------

## Scoring the test

Each item is scored between 0 and 4. Add to obtain the score. A score of **8 or more** for the whole questionnaire suggests you have a harmful pattern of drinking.

Additional information can be obtained by looking at the answers to each question.

**Section A** (questions 1, 2, 3) asks about at risk alcohol consumption. A score of 4 (or more) for women, or 5(or more) for men suggests a level of drinking that places the person at risk of harm.

**Section B** (questions 4, 5, 6) asks about symptoms of dependence. A score of 4 (or more) indicates that person may be psychologically or physically dependent on alcohol.

**Section C** (questions 7, 8, 9, 10) asks about problems relating to drinking. A score of 4 (or more) indicates significant problems already.

**The World Health Organisation developed this AUDIT form and kindly gave us permission to use it. The WHO does not endorse any specific company, product or services**

## Needing Alcohol

If you really need a drink and you have a strong need for it, you will have problems in getting a grip on your drinking. Your body is so used to lots of drink that you start to feel ill 3-8 hours after your last drink. You might feel sick, tremble, sweat and crave booze.

### ***You may have a problem if you;***

*(Tick the box that applies)*

- Need a drink every day
- Drink alone often
- Need a drink to stop the shakes
- Drink early, or first thing in the morning (to avoid feeling ill).
- Often have a strong need or urge to drink alcohol.

Spend a lot of time doing things where booze is around. For example, if you spend a lot of time at the pub.

Stop doing other things like hobbies or interests.

## **PART TWO**

### **WHAT DRINK DOES TO YOU**

**Quotes**

**How drink can affect your life**

**Drinking Myths**

**Reasons for Drinking**

## Quotes

Here are some things people have said about their drinking.

“I used to take the odd drink, you know mostly if I went out with pals. Now I find that I’m drinking more and I’m now drinking at home. It helps me relax, but I worry that it’s bad for my health”.

“I know that I drink too much. Sometimes I don’t even remember what happened the night before- it’s like a blackout or something. I cringe when people tell me some of the things I said and did because I can’t remember half of it”

“I find my job very stressful at the moment. It’s really getting me down, so I take a drink to help me relax. Sometimes I feel that I’m not coping with the job. The drink helps me to take my mind off things.”

“I’ve been feeling really down lately. My mother died and I miss her so much. I feel so sad and I’ve started drinking because it just makes me feel better. To be honest most of the time it just makes me feels even sadder.”

‘I know that I should really try and control my drinking. It’s got out of hand. I seem to have problems knowing when to stop. I always end up arguing with my wife. The other night I accused her of seeing someone else behind my back. I called her a slut and said if she didn’t get out of my sight there and then I’d hit her. The next day, I felt really bad. It was the drink that caused me to be more jealous than usual.’

# **How drinking can affect your life**

## **It can affect your health**

If you drink heavily you have more risk of getting health problems such as damage to your liver, stomach and heart. You are also more likely to get high blood pressure. If you are a heavy drinker you are more likely to die early.

## **It can affect how you behave/ act**

It can affect how you behave, e.g. if you drink too much you will be more likely to stagger, stumble and hurt yourself. You may show yourself up and do or say stupid things. The drink may also cause you to get into fights. You may fight with people in the pub or you may be more likely to argue with your close friends and family.

Drink can affect how you feel the next day. Hangovers make you feel ill. You can get a sore head, feel sleepy or feel as if you are going to be sick. Because you feel bad you may find it hard to do your job at work and you may be more likely to make mistakes. You might not feel up to looking after the kids the next day and instead hide away in bed.

### **It can affect your Mood**

Drinking can at first make you feel happier. It can brighten you up. Often if you drink too much you can end up feeling low. This then causes you to feel bad the next day. You may have a hang over or feel anxious, jittery or even guilty. This causes you to drink again because you think it will make you feel better. Because you are relying on it, it lowers your self esteem, and because you rely on it you are more likely to feel less in control. Drinking can affect how you feel in your mood. Although you may take a drink to make yourself feel better, in the long run it is a depressant drug which actually makes you feel down.

# Drinking Myths

## **"Coffee will sober me up"**

Caffeine is a stimulant so you might feel more awake but it won't sober you up.

## **"I'll be fine in the morning"**

Alcohol is broken down by the liver. A healthy liver can get rid of about one unit of alcohol an hour. Sleep will not speed up the rate at which the liver works. Just because you have nights sleep does not necessarily mean you will sober up in the morning. It depends on how much you drank the night before.

## **"Drink makes me alert"**

Alcohol can make you think that you are more alert, but it actually has a depressant effect which slows down your reflexes.

“I’ll be fine if I drink plenty of water before I go to bed”

This can stop hangovers. But it won’t make you less drunk.

**“The safe limits of drinking are too low,  
especially for us Scots”**

The safe limits are based on good research which has identified the level above which problems start to arise. For example, if a man drinks 5 units each day, then on average he doubles his risk of developing liver disease and raised blood pressure.

## Reasons for Drinking

People drink for many different reasons. Look at the chart below and then tick seldom or often for each of the reasons.

Reason	Seldom	Often
I drink because it helps me relax		
I drink because its refreshing		
I drink because it makes me feel good		
I drink because of pressure from friends and workmates		
I drink because its polite to do so on certain occasions		
I drink because I enjoy the taste		
I drink because people I know drink.		
I drink in order to celebrate		

I drink to forget my worries		
I drink because it gives me confidence.		
I drink when I feel angry		
I drink to be sociable		
I drink because there is nothing else to do		
I drink because it makes me feel at ease with people		

## **Part Three**

### **Control your Drinking**

How to get a grip on problem drinking

Some advice/ tips on cutting down

Examples of Drinking Diaries

# **How to get a grip on Problem Drinking**

**Let's look at these reasons one by one.**

## **I drink because it makes me relax**

If you ticked often for this reason you must ask yourself how often you need drink in order to relax. You must ask yourself this question because its too easy to come to use drink as you use tranquilisers- and alcohol is at least as harmful if you come to depend on it in the same way. Remember that being anxious causes you to have shallow, quick breaths. This over breathing can cause you to have nasty signs such as muscle aches, churning stomach and dizziness. Try deeper, slower breathing. Try to think of other ways to relax such as lying back and listening to music. Physical exercise such as running, swimming or walking are also great ways of relaxing. They not only help you relax but also make you feel better in yourself as a whole.

## **I drink because it's refreshing.**

Alcohol is a depressant drug. This means that it dulls the workings of the brain. Depressant drugs make you lose some of your inhibitions and also lower your efficiency at tasks such

as driving and many skills you perform at work. You should remember that one or two units may seem like a stimulant in the short term as it makes you feel more alert. Once you drink more than this, the alcohol begins to have a depressing effect.

### **I drink because it makes me feel good**

If you begin to need drink in order to feel good, you have problems. Try and think of other things that used to make you feel good and build on them.

### **I drink because of pressure from friends and workmates**

If your friends, relatives or workmates are heavy drinkers, the chances are they will try to make you a heavy drinker too.

### **I drink because it is polite to do so on certain occasion**

If the people you drink with give you a hard time if you say that you don't want a drink then you should ask yourself whether you should bother meeting them for a drink.

### **I drink because I enjoy the taste**

A good reason for drinking. But heavy drinking is out because drink dull your brains ability to taste.

### **I drink because it makes me feel at ease with other people.**

This is true for many drinkers, because alcohol is like an oil which makes the conversation flow a little more smoothly. If you begin to find it hard to enjoy company without alcohol, then it is a dangerous reason. This is especially true if you need drink in order to talk to someone of the opposite sex.

### **I drink because people I know drink.**

Remember that you have the choice about how much you drink. Round buying makes this hard as you are more likely because rounds make sure that everyone in the company drinks at the same rate of the heaviest drinker.

### **I drink in order to celebrate.**

Another good reason for drinking, as long as you do not find cause for celebration several times each week!

### **I drink to forget my worries.**

If you answered often for this reason, then you have a potential problem with your drinking. Now and again many drinkers get drunk in order to get rid of tension and have a blow out. But if you begin to drink often for this reason, you will make your worries and problems worse because drink is likely to make you feel more depressed and anxious in the long term.

### **I drink because it gives me confidence**

If you begin to need drink for confidence in every day affairs then beware! If you feel shy, awkward or uncomfortable in company you may find that you need to boost your confidence in other ways, such as joining a club or taking up a new hobby where you meet new friends.

### **I drink when I feel angry.**

If you answered often to this reason for drinking, you must ask yourself why you are drinking rather than trying to change whatever it is that is making you feel angry. Perhaps you will say that you cannot change what makes you angry. But if that

is the case, then drinking may well become a problem for you because you will need it a lot of the time to feel better.

### **I drink to be sociable**

You don't actually need drink to be sociable. Yes it might make you seem more sociable initially but after a few drinks this wears off. The more you practice being sociable the better you will get at it.

### **I drink because there is nothing else to.**

If you ticked often for this reason then take care. Because if drinking is the main way of occupying your free time, when you suddenly have a lot of spare time on your hands for some reason, your drinking will probably increase. Try to think of other ways of relieving boredom such as sport, reading or DIY.

## **Some advice/ tips on cutting down**

### **Stage one: Before you start**

#### **If you are going to drink try:**

- Drinking low alcohol beers or at least do not drink strong beers or lagers.
- -Pacing the rate of drinking Perhaps you could make every second drink a water or soft drink.
- Eating food while you drink. Food, such as peanuts and crisps, slows down the speed drink gets into your blood.
- Taking your time with your drink. Sip it and savour the taste. Don't gulp it.
- Keeping active; don't just sit around and drink. If you move around more you will drink less and you will be more aware of the effects alcohol has on you, than if you were to sit down and drink. Try

playing darts, or going for a walk after a few drinks.

- Doing other things where you drink can help.
- Drinking on an empty stomach means that the body absorbs alcohol very quickly and you will soon feel drunk. Food slows this down, so eat something before going out.
- It takes the body about an hour to get rid of one unit of alcohol. Alcohol also dries up the body. Spacing alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water helps the body cope.
- Drinking a pint of water after a night out helps stop a hangover.
- Mixing types of drink – beer with wine or spirit will lead to a bad hangover the next day.
- The darker the drink the worse the hangover!

## **Now here is more sound advice on cutting down on your drinking**

### **Tell People**

People often find it better to stick to plans if they have told other people about it. So it's a good idea to tell your husband, wife, family etc about it. These people can help and support you. They can also help you to be more aware of triggers which may cause you to drink such as meeting up with certain friends.

### **Fill in a drinking diary**

This can give you a clear idea of how much drink you roughly have in one week. These diaries look at events and times where you are more likely to drink e.g. when stressed after you come home from a busy day at work. You may find it useful to fill one in so that you can get an idea about what makes you more likely to drink. See table one and two for examples of drink diaries. If you are not keen on using a drinking diary, then just have a think about people, events or feelings that

make you more likely to drink. If you are not sure, then ask those close to you to see if they spot a pattern in your drinking.

### **Pin point times when you are more likely to drink**

Once you have had a good look at the drinking diary you may be able to pin point any time you are more likely to drink. You can then look at ways of cutting the drinking down. This may be done by starting drinking a bit later than usual, or by steering clear of certain friends with whom you tend to drink too much. If you don't want to avoid your friends then think of ways that you can tell them that you've cut down. You could, perhaps still meet up with them but take the car. This then lets them know you cannot drink. Ask family or friends if they notice times or events where you are more likely to drink. Does how you feel in your mood lead you to drink more? For example if you are angry, fed up, stressed or low then this may cause you to drink more.

Once you have made some rules about your drinking, be aware of the fact that certain places or times may fill you with the urge to drink. If you are used to having a drink when you come home from work then in future you will feel more of an

urge to drink when you get back home. Also, if in the past you have often got drunk with certain friends, then when you meet up with them you are more likely to feel the urge to get drunk with them. You must learn to avoid those situations where in the past you have drunk heavily or you have got into trouble.

**Try to work out what is the most drink you will have in one go**

An example would be I will not drink any more than 5 units of alcohol in one night. Try and work within the sensible advice of taking no more than 21 units a week if you are a man and taking no more than 14 units a week if you are a woman. It's not a good idea to drink the weekly amount all at once.

You may find it useful to cut down the amount of days or nights that you drink e.g. if you drink every night then trying to cut it down by drinking every second or third night.

## **Plan out a set of drinking rules for yourself and write them down**

An example might be:

- I will never drink before 8pm.
- I will never drink for more than 3 hours at a time.
- I will only drink 4 drinks at the most at one time
- I will only drink 3 nights a week.

Try to think of the reasons you drink. Try reading some of the other STEPS books on depression, anxiety, panic, bereavement, anger and low self esteem.

The next page has examples of drinking diaries: First Louise and then Paul

<i>Day</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Situation i.e. where were you?</i>	<i>Who were you with</i>	<i>What was going through your mind to make you drink</i>	<i>What did you drink</i>	<i>How many units</i>	<i>What happened as a result of you drinking</i>
Monday	8pm	At home	Alone	I felt bored and down 'I need a drink to feel better'	1 bottle wine	6	Felt sadder at end of night – cried a lot – slept in for work next day.
Tuesday	6pm	At home	Friend Judy came up for dinner	We need to have a laugh together we haven't seen each	1 ½ bottles wine		Ended up having words with Judy and falling out, felt jittery at work next day –

				other in ages.			went home sick.
Friday	9pm	Out for meal and drink with boyfriend Joe	Boyfriend Joe	I'll feel more relaxed and enjoy his company more	3 glasses wine	3	Had nice night went home and watched a video then bed. Felt better next day.
Saturday	7pm	At Home (Joe cancelled coming round and decided to go out with his mates instead).	Alone	Joe is wanting to chuck me. I need a drink to make me cope.	1 bottle wine	6	Fell a sleep on floor. Was supposed to meet mum for lunch next day, but told her I was ill.

# PAUL'S DRINKING DIARY

<i>Day</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Situation i.e. where were you?</i>	<i>Who were you with</i>	<i>What was going through your mind to make you drink</i>	<i>What did you drink</i>	<i>How many units</i>	<i>What happened as a result of you drinking</i>
Monday	6pm	Pub (The Swan)	Paul & Ian (Mates)	I won't enjoy their company as much if I don't drink.	4 pints	8 units	Fell out with Ian at end of night.

Wednesday	2pm	Pub Lunch (The Swan)	Friends from work	I was feeling stressed so a few drinks would help me relax.	4 whiskies	4 units	Had problems focusing on my work afterwards.
Thursday	8pm	Out with Girlfriend Amy to pub	Amy	We'll have a nice romantic night and a few drinks.	8	8 units	Had argument with Amy she stormed off in a bad mood.
Saturday	9pm	Out to the Pub with my Mates then on to a Club	Paul & Jim (Mates)	Got to drink it's the weekend after all!	5 pints (in Pub) a lot more in the Club can't remember.	10+ units	Ended up in a fight in the night club and got tossed out.



## *Paul and Louise's Diaries*

By having a good look at Paul and Louise's drinking diaries, you might be able to pick out times or situations when they were more likely to drink e.g. Paul was likely to drink more when he was with his mates at the pub, whereas Louise was more likely to drink when she was alone at home. We can see from both their diaries the effects that alcohol can have on their lives by looking at the final column in the diary. They slept in for work, had fights because of the drink or felt ill the next day.

You can now become your own therapist by filling in the Diary Sheet below and then pinpointing times where you drink too much.

After that then you should fill in a Weekly Goal Sheet, where you should write down your plan.

# ***MY DIARY*** .....

<b><i>Day</i></b>	<b><i>Time</i></b>	<b><i>Situation i.e. where were you?</i></b>	<b><i>Who were you with</i></b>	<b><i>What was going through your mind to make you drink</i></b>	<b><i>What did you drink</i></b>	<b><i>How many units</i></b>	<b><i>What happened as a result of you drinking</i></b>




## **Some Useful Contacts**

### **Alcohol Focus Scotand**

2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 166 Buchanan Street, Glasgow G1 2LW.

Tel; 0141 572 6700

Website [www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk)

### **Al-Anon**

22 Mansfield Street, Glasgow, G11

0141 339 8884

[enquiries@al.anon.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@al.anon.org.uk)

[www.al-anon.org.uk](http://www.al-anon.org.uk)

### **Alcoholics Anonymous (Head Office)**

PO Box 1, Stonebow House, Stonebow, York YO1 7NJ

Tel; 01904644026

Website [www.alcoholics-annonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-annonymous.org.uk)

### **Drinkline**

Open daily Monday to Friday 9pm-11pm, Saturday and Sunday 6pm-11pm. Calls are free and confidential.

Tel; 0800917 8282

### **Glasgow Council on Alcohol**

0141 353 1800

[www.thegca.org.uk](http://www.thegca.org.uk)