

If it all goes wrong

Drinking very large amounts in one session can lead to alcohol poisoning, unconsciousness, coma or even death. If it all goes wrong, it's essential to get emergency help...

If someone loses consciousness after drinking too much, here's what to do:

- keep them on their side with their head turned to the side (the recovery position).
- make sure they're breathing and their mouth and airways are clear.
- if they stop breathing, start mouth to mouth resuscitation.
- loosen any tight clothing that might restrict their breathing.
- keep them warm (but not too hot) - with blankets or a coat.
- call an ambulance but don't leave them... ask someone reliable to phone the ambulance.

If someone vomits you should:

- try to keep them sitting up
- if they must lie down, make sure they're in the recovery position and that their mouth and airway are clear
- if they begin to choke, get help immediately
- don't leave them even if you can't bear the sight or smell of someone vomiting. Alcohol poisoning is extremely dangerous. It can lead to a coma and in extreme cases, death. The amount of alcohol it takes to cause alcohol poisoning depends on many factors, including size, weight, age and so on. Teenagers and inexperienced drinkers are particularly vulnerable.

Someone may have alcohol poisoning if:

- they are breathing less than twelve times a minute or stop breathing for periods of ten seconds or more
- they're asleep and you can't wake them up
- their skin is cold, clammy, pale and bluish in colour.

If you suspect someone has alcohol poisoning, treat it as a medical emergency - call an ambulance and stay with the person until help arrives.

Is it worth it?

Someone is far more likely to be involved in an accident, a fight, be robbed or assaulted or to get in trouble with the police if they get drunk. If someone ends up with a criminal record, it affects their chances of a good career and they could lose their driving licence through letting things get out of hand.

Even drinking to get drunk occasionally can have serious consequences. It affects a person's judgement and can increase risky behaviour, which could result in:

- injuries and accidents
- unsafe sex, which could result in sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies
- being robbed or going home with a stranger
- fights, arguments and relationship problems
- getting into trouble with the police and getting a criminal record.



Top Tips for staying safe if you plan to drink



Here are some tips to help you stay in control and have a good time.

Units and mixing

The amount of alcohol in drinks varies a lot, so check the label to find the alcohol content of a drink. Many drinks now carry unit icons on the packaging or back labels.

For example, a standard glass (175ml) of wine at 12% alcohol will contain 2 units, the same as a double vodka or whisky, or a pint of traditional beer at 3.5%. Premium beers will be 4.5% or above, increasing a drinker's intake by a unit a pint, and a large glass of wine at 14% will be nearly 4 units.

Know your limits

This bottle contains 6 glasses

Units of alcohol per 125ml glass and 75cl bottle:



Home pours of drinks are usually much bigger than pub measures, so with spirits have a long mixer and plenty of ice. Also watch out for 'top ups' - It's possible for someone to kid themselves that they're still on the same drink - finish the glass first before having another drink, so it's easier to keep track of units.

Pacing

If you are going to be drinking over several hours - either out on the town or at friends', you could drink much more than you realise. A great way to stay on top is either not to drink at all or to alternate soft drinks or water with each alcoholic drink. Alcohol is dehydrating, so water or long refreshing pacers make a big difference - especially if you're dancing and using energy!

A quick bite

It's very tempting, especially if you're going out straight from college or work, not to eat. However, having a quick sandwich or bowl of cereal before you go out will slow the absorption of alcohol into the blood stream.

It's best to try to limit rounds of drinks to 2 or 3 friends. In larger groups, someone might be tempted to say yes each round to get their money's worth! If someone is in a big group and others are drinking faster - or more than they want, it would be better to skip a round, go and sit down, have a dance or opt out, rather than to keep drinking.

Look out for each other

It is important that friends look out for each other. Surveys show that over 30% of people have taken risks or got into an uncomfortable situation by either going home after a night out on our own or with a stranger. Don't risk it! Also, never leave your drink unattended in bars and clubs or accept drinks from complete strangers. (See the drink spiking factsheet on alcoholeducationtrust.org/drink_spiking_sheet/).



Plan how to get home before going out

If there's no designated driver or lift arranged, have the number for a reliable taxi or know the times of public transport and keep aside enough money to get home safely. If walking home, don't walk through unlit or unsafe areas and never walk home alone. Have a fully charged mobile and tell someone at home where you are going.

Party planning

When having a party, the host will want friends to have a great time, naturally. However, they also want to be a responsible host too, so here are some simple tips to make sure everyone has a good time without things getting out of hand.

- If alcohol is served, keep an eye on the size of measures – don't be too generous and try to stick to pub measures and smaller glasses.
- Offer plenty of water and alcohol free alternatives.
- Serve food - it really helps to soak up the alcohol.
- Watch the strength of mix in home made cocktails – use plenty of ice and mixers.
- If people have had a bit too much to drink, encourage them (very nicely) to have a soft drink. Tell a 'white lie' – like the beer has run out!



- Keep a special eye out for young people and make sure they're OK.
- Make sure everyone can get home safely, using a designated driver, public transport, or taxi.
- Have taxi phone numbers available and if at all possible pre-book.
- As host, set a good example and drink in moderation.

Safer Summer Holidays

When going away for sun, sea and fun, have a great time - just try and remember these simple tips.

- If travelling by air, especially on long flights try not to be tempted to drink too much, even if it is free! Water and soft drinks are a better choice as both alcohol and altitude dehydrating.
- Because alcohol and the heat of the sun are dehydrating, it's important to drink at least a litre of water a day.
- Don't let drink lead you into risky situations, with strangers, swimming pools or unknown places.
- Mixing drink with sports, from volleyball to rock climbing, can lead to injuries. So play it safe. Likewise, midnight swimming and drinking is never advisable.
- When going out in the car, decide beforehand who's going to be the designated driver. It's their job to make sure everyone gets home safely.
- Bars abroad often serve larger measures of spirits than at home so just two vodkas could be the same as four or five at home.
- Lather on the sun lotion when relaxing in a beer garden, on the beach, or at a BBQ. A combination of hangover and sunburn is enough to spoil anyone's holiday.



- In some countries, alcohol is restricted or banned. Consult a guidebook or travel agent before travelling, and respect local laws and customs. Apart from being common courtesy, ignoring advice can lead to serious punishment.
- When waiting for a flight at the airport don't drink too much as people who appear drunk may not be allowed to travel.
- Many insurance companies won't pay up if someone has an accident after drinking too much.
- It is important to check drink drive limits when abroad as they may be lower. Most of Europe has a BAC limit of 0.05 (Sweden 0.02 and Hungary zero) – and in the US it is illegal for anyone under 21 to have alcohol in their blood if they are driving.
- Don't risk spending the holiday behind bars – nominate one amongst the group to be the designated driver before going out, book a taxi, or use public transport.

Festivals

- Make sure to go with friends who can be relied on - stick together and have regular meet up times during the day and evening. Take plenty of sun cream, wellies, waterproof and a hat.
- Food and drinks can be expensive, so take light things like cereal bars, dried fruit, frozen water and milk (keeps

other stuff cool for a while). Don't take anything valuable - take a cheap phone with a long battery life and a wind up or solar charger.

- Just because it's a party atmosphere, don't trust strangers or be tempted to try things they may offer.

Top tips for the morning after

If in spite of the best intentions someone ends up drinking more than they should, there are a few things that can ease the morning after.

- Drink a lot of water before going to sleep, and put some beside the bed too.
- Take an antacid to settle the stomach.
- Alcohol is a depressant, so tea or coffee can perk someone up (but they can also add to dehydration, so keep up the water as well). Drinking lowers the blood sugar level, so eat as soon as possible. Bananas, cereal, or egg on toast are all good morning-after snacks.
- Never ever do hair of the dog - It will just prolong the agony.
- Have 48 hours without alcohol if it was a heavy session.
- And next time, either refrain from drinking or set a clear limit before the party and stick to recommended guidelines. Follow our top tips to avoid suffering again.

