



# Alcohol and Your Health

## KNOW THE LOW-RISK DRINKING LIMITS

*Drinking too much alcohol on any single day or over time can have serious consequences on your health. Use this handout to understand what low-risk drinking is, how much you are drinking, and what the risks are.*

### What is low-risk drinking?

#### Low-Risk Drinking Limits

	Weekly limit	Daily limit
Men ages 18-65	14 drinks	4 drinks
Women ages 18 and older Men ages 66 and older	7 drinks	3 drinks

\*You must meet both the single day and the weekly limits to be a low-risk drinker.

### Examples of high-risk drinking:

- A 35 year old man drinks 5 drinks on Wednesday and 5 drinks on Saturday. This is high-risk because he is exceeding the daily limit of 4 drinks even though he is within the weekly limit of 14 drinks.
- A woman drinks 2 drinks everyday. This is high-risk because she is exceeding the weekly limit of 7 even though she is within the daily limit.

### How much is one drink?



### Binge drinking is dangerous

Binge drinking puts you at risk for alcohol-related health problems, even if you do it only occasionally.

- For men ages 18-65, binge drinking means having more than 4 drinks in 1 day.
- For women ages 18 and older and men ages 66 and older, binge drinking means having more than 3 drinks in 1 day.



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### Health effects of drinking above low-risk limits

- Risks include accidents and injuries, high blood pressure, weight gain, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, cancer, stomach bleeding, and sexually transmitted infections from unsafe sex.
- Drinking while pregnant can cause brain damage and other serious problems in the baby. Do not drink alcohol during pregnancy.
- Studies on the benefits of alcohol to heart disease suggest only small amounts, below the low-risk limits, can be helpful for people without health problems.
- Even those who only occasionally drink heavily are at high risk of injury to themselves or others.

### Low Risk is not No Risk

Even within the limits, low-risk drinkers can have problems if they drink too quickly, have health problems, or are older. Based on your health and how alcohol affects you, you may need to drink less or not at all.

### Do not drink alcohol if you:

- Plan to drive, or operate machinery
- Take medications that interact with alcohol
- Have a medical condition that can be made worse by drinking
- Are pregnant or trying to become pregnant

### Other resources

<http://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>

- Connect to our website at **kp.org** to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- If you are concerned about your drinking, talk to your health care provider about ways to get help.
- If you are hit, hurt, or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to **ndvh.org**.

### Strategies for cutting back:

**Set goals.** Decide how many days a week you want to drink and how many drinks you'll have on those days. It's a good idea to have some days when you don't drink. Drinkers with the lowest rates of alcohol use disorders stay within the low-risk limits.

**Pace and space.** When you drink, pace yourself. Sip slowly. Have no more than one standard drink with alcohol per hour. Have "drink spacers"—make every other drink a non-alcoholic one, such as water, soda, or juice.

**Include food.** Don't drink on an empty stomach.

**Avoid "triggers."** If certain people or places make you drink even when you don't want to, try to avoid them. If certain activities, times of day, or feelings trigger the urge, plan what you'll do instead of drinking. If drinking at home is a problem, keep little or no alcohol there.

**Find alternatives.** If drinking has occupied a lot of your time, then fill free time with new, healthy activities. Engage in new hobbies and relationships, or renew ones you've missed. If you have counted on alcohol to make you feel more comfortable in social situations, manage moods, or cope with problems, then seek other, healthy ways to deal with those areas of your life, such as breathing exercises, physical exercise, or relaxation.

**Know your "no."** You're likely to be offered a drink at times when you don't want one. Have a polite, convincing "no, thanks" ready. The faster you can say no to these offers, the less likely you are to give in. If you hesitate, it allows time to think of excuses to go along.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.