

# FACT SHEET

## RECOMMENDED DRINKING LIMITS

There has been some debate concerning the appropriate drinking limits. The Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Medical Association have all recommended that men should drink less than 21 units per week and women less than 14 units per week.

The most recent advice from the Department of Health refers to increased morbidity and mortality associated with drinking 'more than 3 to 4 units a day' for men and 'more than 2 to 3 units a day' for women. However this seems to have led to some confusion, since it can be understood as merely a change to daily limits rather than weekly limits, or an implicit increase in the weekly limits.

The three key points are very simple:

- 1 The **weekly** limit of 21 units for men and 14 units for women **REMAINS THE SAME**. Obviously people vary and the figures approximate average safety levels.
- 2 There is a new additional emphasis on the amount which it may be considered sensible for a person to drink on any one day.

For men the recommended daily upper limit is 4 units **maximum**  
For women the recommended daily upper limit is 3 units **maximum**

- 3 It is recommended that people **DO NOT DRINK THIS MAXIMUM AMOUNT EVERY DAY**, (which would, after all, mean exceeding the weekly limit!)

So a sensible drinking pattern for a man might look like this:

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	
3	4	-	2	4	4	3	units (i.e. 21 per week)

A sensible drinking pattern for a woman might look like this:

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	
2	3	2	-	2	2	3	units (i.e. 14 per week)

The weight of medical and scientific authority would appear to support the recommendations of the Royal colleges and the BMA as does the UK Alcohol Forum

There are certain safety sensitive situations in which all authorities that it is not appropriate to drink at all. These include driving, water sports, some occupational settings (e.g. operating machinery, healthcare workers, working at heights) and when taking medication which interacts with alcohol. Pregnant women and women trying to conceive are also best advised to abstain completely.

There is a small health benefit in terms of prevention of coronary heart disease to be derived from drinking alcohol for men over 40 years of age and for post-menopausal women. However, this **benefit** is greatest at a level of consumption **not exceeding** two units a day for both sexes. (While some people in these categories may wish to consider the possible benefit of light drinking, it is necessary to take individual medical social, cultural and psychological factors into consideration before encouraging anyone to take up drinking. Taking exercise can be just as beneficial!)

After an episode of heavy

The dangers of intoxication should be emphasised, especially to young people who may indulge in risk-taking behaviour.

Any health advice should take into consideration all aspects of a person's make-up and lifestyle. Drinking alcohol carries other risks besides the medical ones.

*For advice and information ring the **Alcoline** on **0115 941 4747** or **0845 762 6316** then **press 1***