

Patient information factsheet

Reducing your alcohol intake before your cardiac operation

Reducing your alcohol intake is an important part of preparing your body for an operation and for recovering afterwards. This factsheet contains some helpful tips on how to reduce your alcohol intake before your operation. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Benefits of reducing your alcohol intake before your operation

Regularly drinking above the recommended limits of alcohol can affect your health and make it harder for your body to cope with the stress of surgery. This puts you at an increased risk of experiencing complications both during and after your operation. For example, having:

- two or three alcoholic drinks a day can increase your risk of complications by up to 50%.
- five alcoholic drinks a day can increase your risk of complications by up to 300%.

Cutting down how much alcohol you drink before your operation will help to reduce your risk of:

- increased bleeding
- anaesthetic complications (alcohol can affect how well the anaesthetic works)
- heart, lung and liver complications
- wound complications
- infection
- admission to intensive care
- a longer stay in hospital
- a longer recovery time
- postoperative delirium (a temporary state of confusion and disorientation that can occur after an operation)

Cutting back on how much alcohol you drink can also improve your:

- immune system
- mood
- energy levels
- quality of sleep

Alcohol guidelines

Drinking above the recommended limits of alcohol is known to be linked to many medical conditions. The Department of Health advise that: 'to keep health risks to a low level, it is safest not to drink more than 14 units per week. For adults who drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to spread this evenly over 3 days or more.' That is around six medium (175ml) glasses of wine, or six pints of 4% beer.

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There are no completely safe levels of consuming alcohol, but sticking within these guidelines lowers your risk of harming your health.

Alcohol units

Type of drink	Number of alcohol units
Single small shot of spirits* (25ml, ABV 40%)	1
Alcopop (275ml, ABV 5.5%)	1.5
Small glass of red, white or rosé wine (125ml, ABV 12%)	1.5
Bottle of lager, beer or cider (330ml, ABV 5%)	1.7
Pint of lower-strength lager, beer or cider (ABV 3.6%)	2
Standard glass of red, white or rosé wine (175ml, ABV 12%)	2.1
Can of lager, beer or cider (440ml, ABV 5.5%)	2.4
Large glass of red, white or rosé wine (250ml, ABV 12%)	3
Pint of higher-strength lager, beer or cider (ABV 5.2%)	3
Bottle of red, white or rosé wine (750ml, ABV 13.5%)	10

*Gin, rum, vodka, whisky, tequila and sambuca. Large (35ml) single measures of spirits are 1.4 units.

Unit calculator

You can use this unit calculator to find out how many units are in a particular drink, or to check how much you are drinking.

Website: www.alcoholchange.org.uk/alcohol-facts/interactive-tools/unit-calculator

When to reduce your alcohol intake

We recommend cutting back on how much alcohol you drink ideally **four to eight weeks before** your operation. If you are not able to do this, not having alcohol for **48 hours before** your operation will still have some benefits.

You do not need to completely avoid alcohol before your operation, but we advise that you stay below the recommended maximum amounts.

How to reduce your alcohol intake

You can help reduce your alcohol intake before your operation by:

- setting a limit of how much you are going to drink and sticking to it
- letting your family and friends know you are cutting down and asking for their support
- planning other activities for when you would usually be drinking
- eating before you start drinking
- avoiding buying drinks in rounds
- limiting the time you spend with heavy drinkers
- switching to lower-strength or 0% alcohol drinks
- staying hydrated (alternate alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks)
- planning at least two alcohol-free days each week

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If you drink high levels of alcohol or have an alcohol use disorder, it is important that you get advice from a healthcare professional first before reducing your alcohol intake. Suddenly reducing or stopping drinking alcohol can lead to alcohol withdrawal syndrome (physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms), which can cause serious complications.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- sweating
- mild tremors
- nausea (feeling sick)
- becoming anxious or irritable

If you notice any of these symptoms, contact your general practitioner (GP) or NHS **111** for advice.

If you are an inpatient, speak to your ward nurse or a member of your surgical team.

Call **999** immediately if you have severe symptoms of alcohol withdrawal, including:

- hallucinations
- severe tremors
- seizures or fits

Alcohol support

If you drink alcohol on a regular basis, you may find it difficult to stop. For help and advice on cutting back on the amount of alcohol you drink, please speak to a member of your healthcare team.

Alternatively, you can call Drinkline (the national alcohol helpline) for free, confidential help.

Telephone: **0300 123 1110** (weekdays, 9am to 8pm and weekends, 11am to 4pm)

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

If you are an inpatient

Please speak to your ward nurse or a member of your healthcare team.

If you are an outpatient

Cardiac surgical case managers

Telephone: **023 8120 8686** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm)

Email: ncm@uhs.nhs.uk

Useful links

For more information on preparing for your operation, please read our 'Preparing for surgery' leaflet: www.uhs.nhs.uk/Media/UHS-website-2019/Patientinformation/Surgery/Preparing-for-surgery-3167-PIL.pdf

www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less

www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/tips-on-cutting-down-alcohol

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www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/alcohol-support

www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice-and-support/alcohol-support-services/support-lines

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