

To mark EU Action on Alcohol Week which runs from 18th–22nd November, we are encouraging people to become better informed about the effects of alcohol in order to help make positive lifestyle choices.

Many of us enjoy a drink. In fact, according to the Heathy Ireland Survey (2015), approximately 76% of the Irish population drink alcohol, with 53% of drinkers doing so weekly. And while some might refer to a ‘drinking culture’, in reality, we all drink in different ways.

For more on how Ireland drinks as a nation, visit:

<https://alcoholireland.ie/facts/how-much-do-we-drink/>

Like any other drug, alcohol use or misuse can have an impact on every aspect of our life, including our work, relationships, our physical health and mental wellbeing.

Thinking about our relationship with alcohol is a start to understanding how it can affect us. Here just a few questions we might ask ourselves:



How often have you missed work or gone to work with a hangover?

It's estimated that excessive drinking has cost the Irish economy approximately €41 million in lost working days. The effects however can be also be felt when we're at work. **Presenteeism** – going to work when we're ill – can have its own numerous negative effects. The effects of alcohol particularly in the workplace may include tiredness and a lack of concentration, affecting our performance and productivity, and in turn, leading to further stress and anxiety. For organisations – raising staff awareness on the potentially negative effects of alcohol can be a key factor in reducing its impact in the workplace.

Do you ever reach for a drink when feeling stressed?

It's normal to want to relax after a challenging day, however, opting for an alcoholic drink to try to relieve tension or mask anxiety may ultimately make things worse. Alcohol is a depressant – while it can initially lift mood, once it starts to wear off you may start to feel agitated in the short-term and in the long-term may increase the likelihood of experiencing mental health issues such as depression. **Anxiety and depression are more common in heavy drinkers – heavy drinking is more common in those with anxiety and depression.**

For more on alcohol and mental health, visit:

<https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/health/mental-health-and-alcohol/>

Do you often have 6 or more drinks in one occasion?

For many, a hangover or being ill are two of the short-term effects of excessive drinking, but how often do we consider the wider impact on our long-term health? The HSE low-risk guidelines recommend up to 17 standard drinks spread out over one week for men and up to 11 for women. Drinking above guidelines risks a number of long-term health issues – including heart disease, high blood pressure and damage to vital organs such as the liver.

For more on standard drink guidelines and potential effects of excessive drinking, visit:

<https://www.drinkaware.ie/facts/what-are-the-low-risk-weekly-guidelines>

Do you have a tendency to argue more often with people when you drink?

Alcohol can lower our mood and our inhibitions, with psychological effects that can affect our judgement and influence social interactions. It's no surprise then that when under the influence we may say or do things that if left unresolved may grow into something more. Drinking heavily may also more broadly affect our relationships with our partner, family and friends.

Once we understand our relationship with alcohol a little better, what can we do to help reduce its impact? Here are just a few ideas:

KNOW THE IMPACT

Do you know how much you are drinking each week? [askaboutalcohol.ie](https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie) have a drinks calculator that enables you to find out how your drinking is impacting on your health, your wallet and your weight. Visit: <https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/your-drinking/drinks-calculator/>

KNOW YOUR UNITS

Do you know how many units are in a standard drink? Finding out is a great place to start to understand your drinking habits.

For a standard drink guide, visit:
<https://www.drinkaware.ie/facts/what-is-a-standard-drink>

TRY ALTERNATIVES

Try alternative ways to deal with stress. Instead of reaching for a beer or glass of wine after a hard day, go for a run, swim or to a yoga class, or a talk to a friend about what's worrying you.

Give alcohol-free days a try. If you drink regularly, your body starts to build up a tolerance to alcohol. This is one of the main reasons why it's important to consider taking regular breaks from drinking. Test out having a break for yourself and see what positive results you notice.



REDUCE THE HARM

When we are drinking, there are a number of easy steps that we can take to reduce the impact of alcohol in the short-term. Here are a few:

- Have something to eat before you start drinking
- Avoid drinking in rounds
- Try drinking water between drinks
- Know what your limits are and stick to them
- Plan how you are getting home
- Keep track of how much you're drinking throughout the evening
- Be aware of how certain drinks affect you
- Have a few drink-free days each week

If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking, you can get information and advice by:

Contacting your GP, or visiting:
<http://www.drugs.ie/phone>
<https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/>
<https://www.drinkaware.ie/>
<https://alcoholireland.ie/>



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