



A.D.V.I.C.E - Topic 4: Alcohol (COVID -19)

Background

As we all are aware, the UK and the rest of the world are currently in a period of our history which is unprecedented. We have not seen restrictions like this since WW2. On 24 March 2020, the Prime Minister introduced social distancing guidelines and announced that most businesses will close. This included our much-loved pubs, clubs and restaurants. We were also told that we should work from home if we can. Some workers have been laid off for a short time which is commonly known as being furloughed.

Alcohol and Mental Health

For those of you that are working from home or have been furloughed, you will find that you have a lot more time on your hands than usual or become bored and this can have an effect on your mental health. As a result, you may want to have a drink and there is nothing wrong with that, but like most things Alcohol should be consumed in moderation.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase of 31.4% in alcohol sales purchased from off-licenses. This has led to concerns that we are drinking more at home and you may think that is ok as the pubs are closed, but before the restrictions were in place, you may want to ask yourself “Did I go to the Pub every night”

While alcohol can have a very temporary positive impact on our mood, in the long term it can cause big problems for our mental health. Alcohol can be linked to:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- High blood pressure
- Obesity
- Diabetes
- Liver disease and liver cancer
- Strokes
- Change in moods

As well as having a significant impact on your health, alcohol misuse can also have long-term social implications. For example, it can lead to:

- Family break-up and divorce
- Domestic abuse
- Unemployment
- Homelessness
- Financial problems

Units of Alcohol – What it's all about?

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level, the UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) low risk drinking guidelines advice for men and women say it is safest not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis. If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it's best to spread your drinking evenly over three or more days. If you want to cut down the amount you drink, a good way to achieve this is to have several drink-free days each week.

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What is an Alcohol Unit?

One unit is 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol. Because alcoholic drinks come in different strengths and sizes, units are a way to tell how strong your drink is. It takes an average adult around an hour to process one unit of alcohol so that there's none left in their bloodstream, although this varies from person to person.



Alcohol by Volume (ABV)

Alcohol content is also expressed as a percentage of the whole drink. Look on a bottle of wine or a can of lager and you'll see either a percentage, followed by the abbreviation 'ABV' (alcohol by volume), or sometimes just the word 'vol'. Wine that says '13 ABV' on its label contains 13% pure alcohol. The alcoholic content in similar types of drinks varies a lot. Some ales are 3.5%. But stronger continental lagers can be 5% or even 6% ABV. Same goes for wine where the ABV of stronger 'new world' wines from South America, South Africa and Australia can exceed 14% ABV, compared to the 13% ABV average of European wines. This means that just one pint of strong lager or a large glass of wine can contain more than three units of alcohol.

Spirit Measures and Wine Glass Sizes

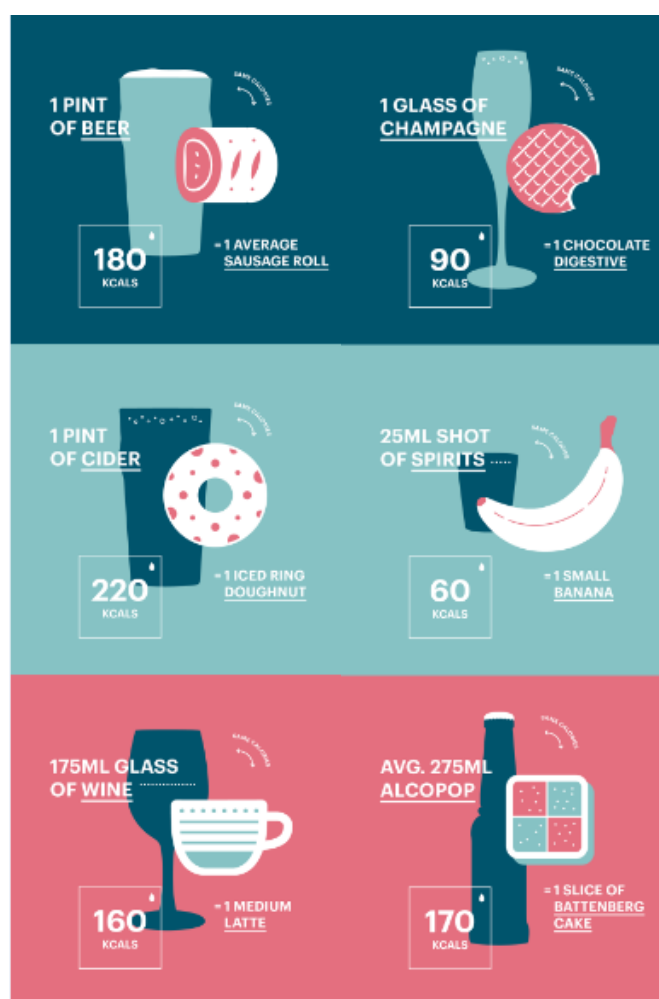
Spirits used to be commonly served in 25ml measures, which are one unit of alcohol, many pubs and bars now serve 35ml or 50ml measures. Large wine glasses hold 250ml, which is one third of a bottle. It means there can be nearly three units or more in just one glass. So, if you have just two or three drinks, you could easily consume a whole bottle of wine – and almost three times the UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines – without even realising. Smaller glasses are usually 175ml and some pubs serve 125ml.



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Alcohol & Calories

Above, we stated that alcohol can cause diabetes and obesity. Some may not consider the calories that are in alcohol and that they are not the same as calories contained in food. Do you know how many calories are in your favourite alcoholic drink? Let's have a look.



Strategies for drinking less at home

If you're pouring your own drinks at home, it's easy to drink more alcohol than you realise. Here are some tips to help you keep track:

- If you drink wine at home, pour small amounts into your glass.
- If you fill glasses to the rim, you'll drink more than you realise. Opt for small (125ml or less) glasses too.
- Measure your spirits instead of free pouring them.
- Try and pour your own drinks. If someone else is constantly topping up your half-filled glass, it's hard to keep track of how much alcohol you're drinking.
- Try tracking your alcohol consumption each day visit <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools/>



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The Morning After

You will also need to be aware of how much you have had to drink before hopping into your car or reporting for work the next day. As we all know, in the Rail Industry we are subject to Random D&A screening. This may have slowed down due to the social distancing guidelines, but it will not be long before the screening is back with us.

As a general guideline it takes approximately, one hour for each unit of alcohol to leave our bloodstream, plus an additional hour for the first drink. So, if you have 3 units of alcohol it is estimated that it be at least 4 hours before the alcohol has left your bloodstream.

Further guidance and information can be found at:

- <https://alcoholchange.org.uk/help-and-support/get-help-now/coronavirus-information-and-advice-hub/coronavirus-alcohol-withdrawal-what-to-look-out-for>
- <http://morning-after.org.uk/>
- <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>