

# **Section 4: Motivational interventions**

# **16. Things to do – self help**

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## **16.1. Introduction**

All the next bits in this pack are things that may help you think about your own drinking or the drinking of others.

They may get you thinking about:

- Where you drink
- How you drink and how much
- When you drink
- What you drink
- Why you drink

There are also questions that will allow you to get an idea about whether or not you may have a problem with drink.

Have a look through the different exercises and see what bits are useful to you. Your offender manager can talk through different bits or you can work with him or her on the things that you write down. Some of the pages can also be copied so you can take them away with you to fill in later.

**REMEMBER ALL THE THINGS IN THIS SECTION ARE HERE TO HELP YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR DRINKING AND PERHAPS DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.**

## 16.2. How much do you really know? – An alcohol quiz

You may have read some of the chapters of the pack or you may come straight to this. It's not a problem - test what you know about alcohol and what it does.

The answers to the quiz can be found at the back of this section (16.23).

Try the quiz without looking at the answers.

		True	False
1.	Alcohol is drunk by 90% of adults in England and Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	Alcohol is not a drug	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	Alcohol is a stimulant	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	Most people develop problems with alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	Drinking a small amount daily can be good for your health	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	Drinking alcohol is legal and so it is safe	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	Alcohol can be drunk in the home after the age of 5 but can only be bought after 18	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	Alcohol is responsible for the majority of violent crimes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Alcohol is linked to over 40,000 deaths a year in England & Wales	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	Binge drinking is safer than drinking a little alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11.	There are no health risks to drinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12.	Alcohol can cause sudden death in some people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13.	Alcohol can increase the risk of some cancers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14.	Alcohol cannot affect the baby during pregnancy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15.	Alcohol can contribute to weight problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16.	Drinking has no long-term health risks for young people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17.	Alcohol has the same effects on men and women	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18.	The use of alcohol only has an effect on the drinker	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19.	Mixing alcohol with other drugs can be dangerous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20.	If a healthy woman drinks no more than 2-3 units a day and a healthy man drinks no more than 3-4 units a day they will not experience any great health risks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## 16.3. The AUDIT screening tool

### Introduction

**It's not always easy to know if you are drinking too much.**

That's where this test comes in.

It gives you an idea of whether or not the level of your drinking in the past year has been harmful or not.

It asks about how many units you drink in a typical day. Remember if you need to work this out look in 5.2.

It also gives you advice about what you can do after you have worked out a score.

### **Answer the questions and be honest!**

The results will help you make decisions about alcohol and the amount you drink.

The results will also give you an idea of how risky your drinking has been.

This test is about an average drinking week in the past year.

It's about how much you drink, where, with whom, and what **were** the effects of your drinking.

## AUDIT test

Please read each question carefully and answer all the questions.

Get your score by adding up the numbers beside each of your answers.

1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 to 4 times a month	<input type="checkbox"/>	2 to 3 times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>	4 or more times per week	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

2. How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?

1 or 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	3 or 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	5 or 6	<input type="checkbox"/>	7, 8 or 9	<input type="checkbox"/>	10 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

3. How often do you have six or more units of alcohol on one occasion?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily or almost daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily or almost daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily or almost daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

6. How often during the last year have you needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session?

Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Monthly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Weekly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Daily or almost daily	<input type="checkbox"/>
(0)		(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	

7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?

Never  Less than  Monthly  Weekly  Daily or   
(0) (1) (2) (3) (4)  
almost daily

8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?

Never  Less than  Monthly  Weekly  Daily or   
(0) (1) (2) (3) (4)  
almost daily

9. Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?

No  Yes, but  Yes,   
(0) (2) (4)  
not during the last year during the last year

10. Has a relative, friend, doctor, or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?

No  Yes, but  Yes,   
(0) (2) (4)  
not during the last year during the last year

NOW ADD UP ALL THE SCORES FROM UNDER THE TICKED BOXES TO GET YOUR TOTAL SCORE

\_\_\_\_\_ TOTAL SCORE

**What Your Score Means:**

**The minimum score is 0 and the maximum is 40**

**A score of 8 or more suggests that you have a risky or harmful drinking pattern and it would be wise to seek some more advice and help about your drinking**

#### 16.4. What does my score on the AUDIT mean?

This test can't find out about your medical problems.

It cannot say for certain if alcohol use is harming your health.

What it can do is say how likely you are to be a problem drinker.

There are four categories and you will find your score in one of them.

Don't forget you may not be drinking now. That doesn't mean that there will not be risks around if you do start to drink.

The effects of alcohol when you start drinking again will be greater than before.

#### **If you have scored between 0 – 7 = Low risk drinking**

##### **Your feedback**

- Your drinking looks like it is **low risk**.
- If you are pregnant or have medical problems you need to seek medical advice.
- Your score is similar to about 75% of UK adults.

##### **Recommendations**

- You should be able to avoid problems.
- You should avoid risky drinking – If you are a woman this means to avoid regularly drinking more than 2-3 units a day or more than 6 units on any one day. If you are a man this means not regularly drinking more than 3-4 units a day or 8 units on any one day (see chapter 5, *The amount of alcohol you are drinking*, for how to work out units).
- If you are pregnant or have medical problems avoid alcohol.
- If you do want some advice look at our *Tips for cutting down* (see 16.10).
- You can do this test at any time. When you are no longer under probation supervision you might want to check if your drinking is still at recommended low risk levels.

## If you have scored between 8 – 15 = Risky drinking

### Your feedback

- You are likely to be drinking *above* low risk levels.
- This means you are at **medium risk**.
- If you are pregnant your drinking is unsafe.
- Because of your drinking you are more likely to suffer harm than most people.
- This means that you are more at risk of being involved in arguments, accidents or unwanted situations.
- You may not have come to any harm so far. If you are able to cut down you should be able to avoid serious problems.
- If you are drinking in the morning it is a sign you may have a more serious problem with alcohol than your score shows.

### Recommendations

- Learn about how many units there are in your drinks.
- If you are a woman try and drink no more than 2-3 units per day.
- If you are a man try and drink no more than 3-4 units a day.
- You seem to be drinking more than this so you need to cut down.
- You may be able to do this without expert help.
- Read our *Tips for cutting down* (16.10) for some ideas on how to change your drinking.
- You will probably find the exercises in this booklet helpful if you want to cut down.

If you think you will find it difficult to change your drinking speak to your offender manager.

You could try the website [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk). This gives lots of advice about drinking and alcohol. Remember you can do this test at any time. When you are no longer under probation supervision you might want to check again. You might wish to visit an alcohol service in the community.

## If you have scored between 16 – 19 = Harmful drinking

### Your feedback

- You are at **high risk**. Your drinking appears to be harmful.
- It is likely that your physical and mental health is suffering because of your drinking.
- You may have experienced problems at home or at work.
- Your drinking may have been a factor in the crime you committed this time.
- If you are drinking in the morning it is a sign you may have a more serious problem with alcohol than your score shows.

### Recommendations

- You learn about how many units there are in your drink.
- If you are a woman try and drink no more than 2-3 units per day.
- If you are a man try and drink no more than 3-4 units a day.
- You are drinking more than this so you need to cut down.
- Look at our *Tips for cutting down* in 16.10 for ideas to help.
- Many people drinking as much as you find it hard to control their drinking.
- If you have found it difficult in the past you can prepare for the future while under probation supervision.
- You should ask your offender manager who can give you details about what is available locally.
- It may be best to cut down and then stop completely for a while.
- If you have found this difficult, it might be time to get professional help.
- You could go to a local alcohol service for help with your drinking. These are confidential and free. You can find a list of England wide services on [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) or by looking in your local telephone directory. You could look at [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk) for general advice. Also, look at the *Getting help - treatment* and *Contact numbers (support services)* chapters of this pack (17 and 18).

## **If you have scored between 20– 40 = Very harmful drinking**

### **Your feedback**

- You are at the **highest level of risk**. Your drinking is very harmful.
- You will have probably experienced problems as a result of your drinking.
- Your drinking may have been a factor in the crime you committed this time.
- If you continue to drink at this level it will cause damage. You should **not** stop drinking today, as you will risk withdrawal symptoms.
- Withdrawal can be dangerous so seek medical help.
- You might want to think of the harm drinking has already caused you and others. You might want to think about what you can do about it.

### **Recommendations**

- You may need professional help to make long lasting changes and improve your health.
- You may need medical help to allow your body to have a rest from the alcohol.
- You should ask your offender manager what help is available to you in your area.
- You can go to an alcohol service for help with your drinking. These are confidential and free. You can find a list of England wide services on [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) or by looking in your phone book.
- You can get help from your doctor.
- Find out more in *Getting help - treatment* (chapter 17) and *Contact numbers (support services)* (chapter 18).
- If you do decide not to drink anymore you could join a self help group like Alcoholics Anonymous.

### **16.5. Your reasons for drinking**

This is all about thinking about the reasons why we drink.

We all drink for different reasons so.....

What do you think are your reasons for drinking?

Why not spend some time making a list.

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After you have finished your list, think about what are the good reasons and what are the bad reasons for drinking.

Also, try and think about the reasons that you can do something about.

Are there things you can change?

## 16.6. Writing out your life story

This next bit is about trying to get an idea where alcohol fits in your life.

Try writing out your life story and see what part alcohol has played.

First drink?

Remember first getting drunk?

Drinking when a child?

Parents drink heavily?

### **16.7. Keeping a drink diary**

To help you get an accurate picture of how much you are actually drinking, a simple thing to do is keep a drink diary.

From today note down every time you drink on the drink diary sheets over the page. These ask for information about every time you drink - there is an example to show you what we mean.

The column 'reasons' is important because your feelings or mood before drinking can be an important factor as well as the reasons for drinking. The 'consequences – good and bad' can show what part mood or feelings may have played. Of course, the consequences may not always be bad – for example, you might go out for a drink and meet new people. Other times you may not feel well after drinking. It is also clear from the example that you should make a separate entry for each drinking session. So, if you have a drink at lunchtime and go out again in the evening, you should record each one separately in the diary.

Over the next few weeks, keep a record of your drinking every day. Do not fill in the diary sheets at the end of the week because you might forget to record some drinks. Only by keeping a close track of your drinking will you be able to see if your intake is creeping up. So start today to record all the alcohol you drink. Try to be as accurate and honest as you can be in keeping the diary. There is no point in cheating yourself!

**Example of your drink diary**

<b>DRINK DIARY</b>								
<b>DAY</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>MONEY</b>	<b>REASONS</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES: Good or Bad</b>	<b>UNITS</b>
SUN	1 -2	Home	Karen	Eating	£5		Sleepy	2
	8 - 12	Pub	Bill and Ian	Darts	£15		Hangover	6
MON								
TUE								
WED								
THU								
FRI								
SAT								
							<b>Total Units:</b>	

**Your drink diary**

<b>DRINK DIARY</b>								
<b>DAY</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>PLACE</b>	<b>PEOPLE</b>	<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>MONEY</b>	<b>REASONS</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES: Good or Bad</b>	<b>UNITS</b>
SUN								
MON								
TUE								
WED								
THU								
FRI								
SAT								
							<b>Total Units:</b>	

### **16.8. How alcohol affects your life**

Now take 10 minutes to write down the ways in which four areas of your life have been affected:

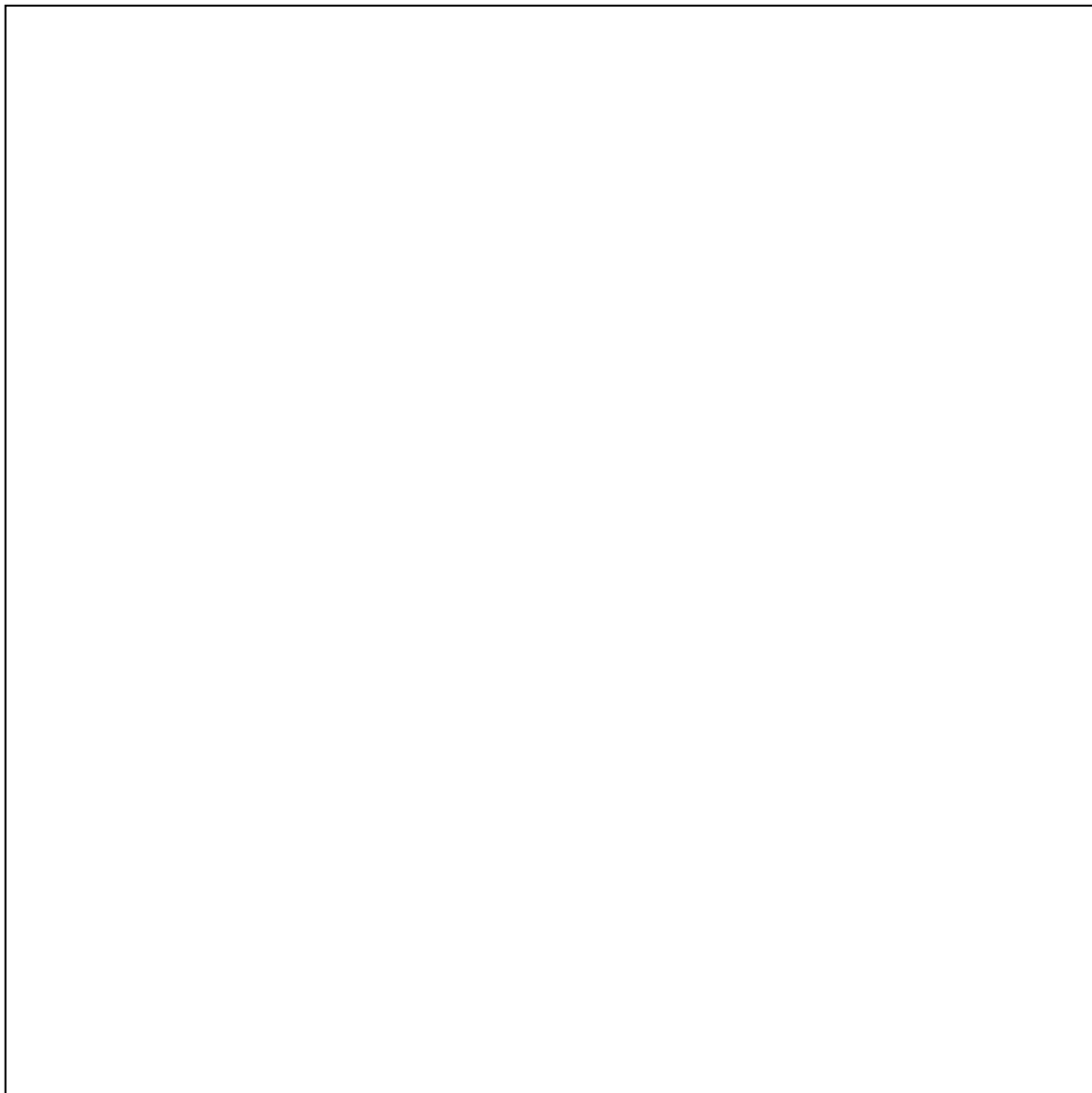
**LOVE LIFE: Relationships**

**LIVELIHOOD: Work**

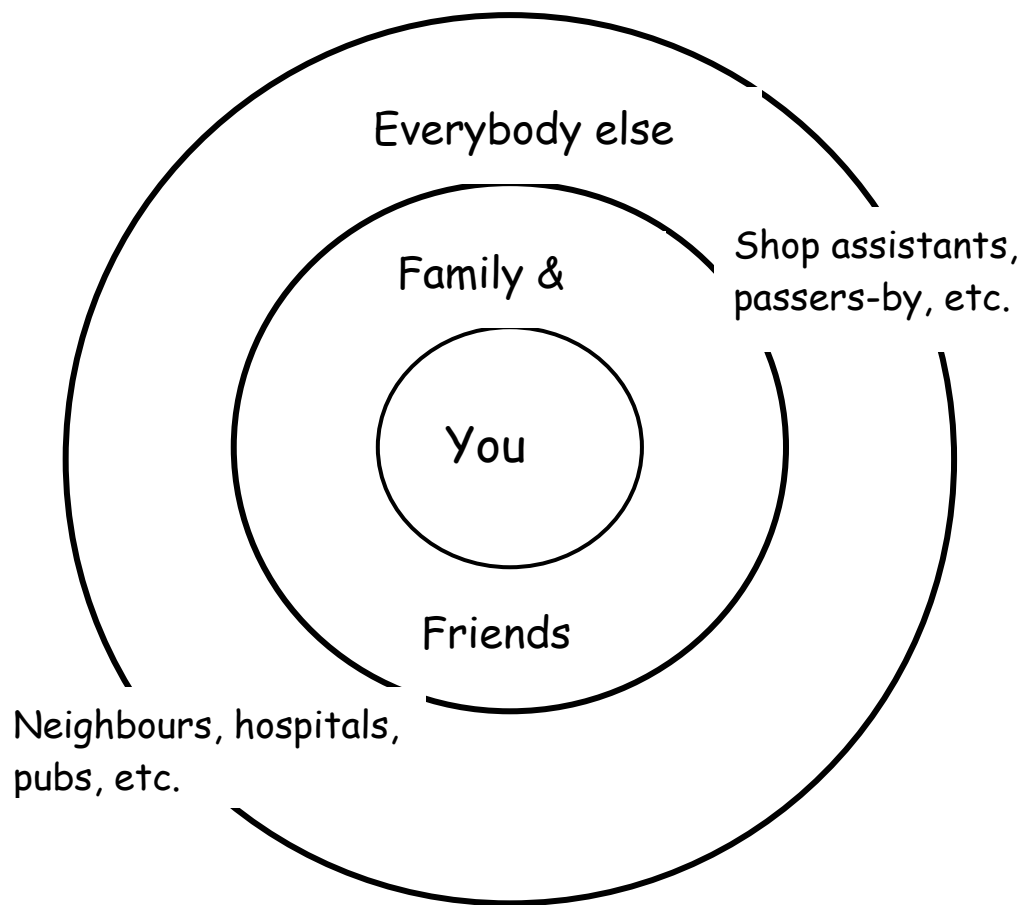
**LIVER: Health**

**LAW: Crime**

If the problems are serious, maybe you should think about stopping (this is perhaps a decision for the future, but there is nothing to stop you planning for what to do right now).

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## 16.9. Looking at how your drinking affects others



Alcohol misuse does not just affect the drinker.

If your drinking is a problem for you, it is likely to be a problem for others.

In the diagram above there are three levels of people. First you, then your family and friends, then everybody else.

Copy the diagram and write down all the people **who** have been affected by your drinking.

Then write down **how** they have been affected by your drinking.

## **16.10. Tips for cutting down**

Small changes to the way you drink can make a big difference. You may want to start thinking now about which tips will be the most useful for you and which ones won't.

### **Alcohol units**

- Know what a unit is and how many are in your drink.
- Practise looking for them on tins, bottles, cans, etc.

### **Set targets**

- Set a maximum daily limit that is closer to advised sensible drinking levels - if you are a heavy drinker and that is difficult then set a target at least under 6 units for a man and 5 units for a woman – make it realistic don't put yourself under pressure but stick to it.
- Spread this over a long period of time i.e. over at least 3 hours.
- Decide how much you are going to drink before you go out.
- Make a plan to change and write it down.
- Make a list of personal drinking rules for safe and healthy drinking – where, who with, when, feelings, etc.
- Make a list of friends who will help you to drink less.
- Make a list of friends with whom you are more likely to drink more.

### **Water**

- Drink water before you go out so that you are not so thirsty.
- Try and drink water between drinks.
- Alcohol uses water from your body so you need to replace it.

### **Food**

- Have a bite to eat before you drink.
- Have a bite to eat while you drink.
- Both of these help your body to slow down how quickly alcohol gets into your blood.

### **Sip your drink**

- Slow down the rate you sip your drink.
- Sip less often and take smaller sips.
- Count the number of sips you take to finish a drink, then increase the number the next time.
- Drink for the taste not just to get it down.
- Put the glass down between sips.
- Don't warm your glass in your hand.

### **Drink spacers**

- Soft drink "spacers" between drinks can help to pace an evening.

### **Day spacers**

- Have a day in the week when you do not drink alcohol.
- Decide the easiest day to do this on and stick to your routine.

### **Money limits**

- If you drink till the money is gone, take less money with you.
- Don't use a debit/credit card - if you have one leave it at home.

### **Switch drinks**

- Some drinks are much stronger than others.
- Switch from a strong drink to a weaker one with a lower %ABV. This will cut down the alcohol units.
- By changing brands you could cut back 1 unit on each drink.

### **Top ups**

- Avoid top ups so that you can keep track of your units.

### **Transport**

- Never drink and drive.
- Think about how you're going to get home before you leave home.
- Take a licensed cab or have a friend who will drive but not drink alcohol.

- Leave enough money for a taxi fare at home so you will always be able to get back safely even if you spend the money you have with you.

### **Change the rounds**

- This is a difficult but important change.
- Try to avoid rounds. These encourage you to drink more because of loyalty to your friends.
- Try and explain to friends that you will buy your own drinks and the reasons why.
- If that is a problem buy one round and then go solo or don't buy a drink when it is your round.
- Try and break the round up into smaller groups.
- Try and buy drinks at the pace of the slowest drinker.

### **Choose your company and your place**

- If you know you will drink a lot with some people, try and avoid always going out with them.
- The same is true of places. You know the places that you drink in. If those places lead to problems for you try to avoid them.

### **Find something else to do**

- Take up a hobby/activity or one you've let slip.
- Visit family or friends.
- Go to a restaurant/café.
- Go to the leisure centre.
- Not all of the above will be useful for you.
- If you want to cut down your drinking choose two or three that you think will help. Stick to them.

**Some people find they cannot just drink a little so it is easier not to drink at all. Remember if you start to change your drinking and you are feeling shaky, sweaty or see or hear things then contact your GP.**

**16.11. Looking to change your drinking style**

Okay. Start by thinking about the things that will help change your drinking and the things that won't help. Make a list now in the boxes below.

People, places and things that will help me change my drinking	People, places and things that will NOT help me change my drinking

What **changes** do you need to make in your life now that you have made that list?

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If you want to change the way you drink what will be the better things – the gains and what will be the bad things – the difficulties for you?

GAINS	DIFFICULTIES

What **changes** do you need to make in your life?

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## 16.12. Thinking about alternatives

Seriously ask yourself what are the alternatives YOU could do on a Friday or Saturday instead of drinking all night long.

What do you normally do on a weekend night?

List below:

*Down the local with friends?*

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What about the different options?

### **Option 1:**

Have one drink      go home have a meal      go dancing or go to cinema

### **Option 2:**

Have a soft drink      play a sport or go to gym      have 1 drink      go for a meal

### **Option 3:**

Go home have a bath and a meal      have one drink      watch a film

### **Option 4:**

Stay for 2 or 3 drinks      go home have a meal      relax with family

### 16.13. Cravings and urges

Learning to deal better with your drinking – either by cutting down or giving up – is not easy. Like any new way of doing something, it takes time, and there will be things to get over.

Not everyone will have cravings or the urge to drink. But perhaps understanding your reasons for drinking or your cravings, urges and triggers to drink, and planning how you will cope with these, will help.

**A Craving** is the “*I want it badly*” feeling. Cravings often trigger off urges. Cravings are natural, but they will disappear over time if you give up drinking.

**An Urge** is “*I have to have a drink now*” feeling – If you can learn to manage how you respond to urges, you can change your behaviour.

The two keys to coping with urges are understanding them and learning strategies to cope with them.

### 16.14. Understanding your urges

Urges are triggers for your behaviour. They don't control you. When you learn more about them you will be less frightened. You will discover that your cravings and urges can serve as triggers for the many coping strategies you will learn.

**FALSE:**

Urges are unbearable (For example: “I’ll die or go crazy if I can't stop this urge immediately”).

**TRUE:**

Though uncomfortable, urges are never really unbearable. If you think of them as unbearable you will feel even more uncomfortable. You will not die or go crazy simply because of urges.

**FALSE:**

Urges make me drink.

**TRUE:**

Drinking is always your choice. Though you might choose to drink as a way to avoid the discomfort, it's still your choice. You can accept discomfort. People (including you!) can and do choose to accept all kinds of discomfort, even the discomfort of withdrawal. They put up with short term discomfort to get long term gains.

**FALSE:**

Urges will just keep getting worse until I give in.

**TRUE:**

Urges build up and then die down like a wave-sometimes a slow wave. Learning to 'surf the urge wave' can be very helpful.

**FALSE:**

Urges never end until I give in.

**TRUE:**

Urges always go away. Urges often pass in minutes or within an hour. Every craving you ever had has gone away. They go away over time, sometimes in just seconds or minutes, without you doing anything special. Using some coping strategies can make it easier for you to ride out urges.

**FALSE:**

Cravings or urges are a sign that my problem is getting worse.

**TRUE:**

Urges and cravings are a normal part of the process of changing a strong and/or long-standing behaviour. Cravings may get stronger at first but with

time, encouragement, and learning and using better ways of coping, they become weaker and can eventually disappear.

**FALSE:**

Giving in to an urge does no harm.

**TRUE:**

Giving in to an urge just continues the behaviour you want to change. You just go round and round the same circle.

The best way to cut the cravings and get rid of the urge is to look at different ways to behave – to do something different.

**FALSE:**

I must get rid of these urges and make them stop.

**TRUE:**

It is normal to have urges. It is a part of changing your life for the better.

Think of it as someone knocking at your front door. Anyone might knock at your door but it is up to you to decide who to let in. You can't stop them knocking but you don't have to let them in.

**Don't worry too much about the urge, the craving, the thought, or the dream. Everyone has them. You are only responsible for how you ACT ON them.**

**FALSE:**

I'm self-destructive or I wouldn't do these things.

**TRUE:**

People usually act in ways that give them pleasure straight away and not to harm themselves.

You may think you are self-destructive because you keep on doing it even though you know it leads to bad results. When you started drinking there was a payoff. Since then, the bad things about your drinking may have outweighed the good things. But it is still hard not to take the short term easy way.

Think of the last time you drank heavily when not really wanting to. Remember the moment you decided to drink. Were you thinking of all the bad things that can happen or were you just thinking how good it would feel?

When you have strong cravings, you might not have looked at the big picture and instead focused on the short term results. That does not mean you have a death wish. A slip or a mistake indicates a need for more work and practice.

**Some people find that keeping an Urge Log helps them to understand their urges. You can do this for a few days or longer. Keep your logs so that you can compare them over the weeks.**

**16.15. Urge log**

Date	Time	How strong on a scale of 1-10	How long did it last?	What triggered it? (where were you, who with, how were you feeling etc)	How I handled it / what I did	My reaction to how I handled it

## **16.16. Coping strategies**

Once you have started to understand your drinking and your behaviour, you can learn strategies for coping with them.

The key to coping is: You can recognise the signs and modify your behaviour, and accept cravings and urges without automatically drinking heavily.

Most people learn a few coping strategies and stick with them. Remember to think them out beforehand and practise them.

The most common ones are:

### **Escape**

- Just leave or get away from the situation, person or place that seems to create the risk to go back to previous behaviour. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel that it will lead to heavy drinking then you need to leave.
- You can plan escapes and excuses. For example, if this person does this then I will do that and avoid this.

### **Avoid**

- Avoid the things that lead to you being put in a risky situation – could be anger, frustration, disappointment.
- Avoid any situation, person or place that has been linked in your mind with the chain of events that led to heavy drinking. This is an easy strategy but you will be more successful if you work out what your high risk situations are before they happen. You might also look for “red flags” that warn you in advance that you are close to a high risk situation.

### **Distract yourself**

- Pay attention to something else.
- Distract yourself with another activity, which can be fun or useful, or at least less harmful. If the urge is very strong, do something to distract yourself – something that you have enjoyed before and which will take

your mind off the feelings. Some people use a very specific task such as counting things (e.g. bricks in a wall, books on a shelf), doing arithmetic (e.g. continually taking away 7 from 1000, 993, 986, etc.), or focusing on a mind game (e.g. saying the alphabet backwards, reading signs backwards, searching book titles, etc.). Any simple activity that you can do quickly can fill up your attention and leaves no room for the risky behaviour.

There are many other strategies for coping with your urges or feelings. These include:

### **Thought stopping**

- When you notice your feelings begin to change and you are thinking more about drinking perhaps wake yourself up with a shout like – STOP! (out loud or in your head). Some people press an imaginary button or switch to turn it off.

### **Thinking it through**

- How strong is the feeling to drink a lot? Worse than having my fingernails pulled out?
- What will happen once I am drinking heavily? Think it through to the end – some people draw mental pictures of the future if they give in to the feelings, and if they don't.
- Remember why you are doing this – some people write down their reasons for changing and carry them in their wallet or purse to look at when they begin to realise those feelings.
- Use the past - remember what has worked before. Remind yourself that the urge will pass. Think about other urges you have that you resist. How do you do that?

### **Riding the wave**

- Know our feelings. Notice that like a wave, your cravings or urges will grow and grow but later grow weaker and disappear. Understanding this, despite the discomfort, can help drive this message home. Use the picture of riding a wave, as if on a surfboard, to show that staying up despite fear

or discomfort is a skill that you can master. Anger, fear, sorrow, pain, and depression will fly through your brain as quickly as pleasure. If you allow yourself to sit with these negative feelings, you'll find they will pass.

### **Sitting it out**

- With or without another strategy, simply don't fall into the same pattern of behaviour and let the time pass into a heavy drinking session. If you can deal with the situation, event, or behaviour then the feeling will disappear. Just as you don't notice smells and noises after a while, so difficult feelings are the same.

### **Phoning a friend**

- If possible talk to someone you trust. This may be a friend, your partner, your alcohol worker, or call a helpline. A lot of people find that talking to someone who has been through the same thing helps a lot. Keep a list of emergency numbers – people you can talk to when you are in a high risk situation.
- Whatever strategy you use, it will be much more successful if you have planned it beforehand.

## 16.17. Coping strategy checklist

### If I run into a high risk situation:

1. I will leave or change the situation. Safe places I can go:

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Phrases to get out of situations:

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2. I will put off the decision to drink for 15 minutes. I'll remember that my cravings usually go away in \_\_\_ minutes and I've dealt with cravings successfully in the past.

---

3. I'll distract myself with something I like to do.  
Good distractions:

---

4. I'll call my list of emergency numbers:

Name:

Name:

Name:

---

5. I'll remind myself of my successes up to now:

---

6. I'll think through what is likely to happen if I DO begin to drink heavily –and if I DON'T

*Source: Adapted from Jaffe et al. 1988.*

## **16.18. Triggers**

What triggers off an urge to drink? Although everyone has different triggers, you are more likely to have an urge – and to give into it – if you are:

**Hungry (or Hurt)**

**Angry**

**Lonely or**

**Tired**

**HALT**

Taking control of situations and your feelings to drink are part of living a more balanced life, and it is important to controlling your drinking that you are trying to live a more balanced life.

### **Learn to relax and manage your stress**

One easy way to cut down your stress is to simply sit, breathe gently but deeply, and not think, for five minutes. This sounds simple but can take some practice.

You might find it helpful to focus on your breath (concentrate on listening to and feeling it going in and out) to help keep your mind from wandering back to things that might be worrying you.

There are many other ways of relaxing – some people find prayer and meditation calms them down, or doing Yoga, listening to relaxation DVDs or soothing music, or having a warm bath. Some people find aromatherapy and massage very relaxing.

### **Eat well-balanced meals**

Eating a healthy and balanced diet helps your body and brain to heal themselves. If you skip meals and eat a lot of junk food, you are not giving your body and brain the high quality fuels they need to work at their best. Many people do not feel able to eat much when they have cut down or

stopped drinking. Try to eat little and often and your appetite will gradually return.

### **Exercise regularly**

Gentle exercise helps cut down stress, speeds up healing, and can help you to sleep. You don't have to take up weight training or memberships of fancy gyms. Walking is a great way to get your blood circulating and muscles moving. It can also be a great stress reliever.

### **Sleep and rest**

Sleep and rest are very important in keeping your body and your brain working properly. Try to keep to a regular routine for going to bed and getting up. Try to stay off tobacco, coffee, snacks and sweets in the late evening. You don't need to charge up your system with extra energy (calories/sugars) or stimulants (caffeine and nicotine) just to go to bed.

You will find it easier to sleep if you use some of the ways of relaxing mentioned above.

## **16.19. Dealing with high risk situations**

There are some people, places, situations that seem to make your urges stronger. Keep a list of your most high risk situations, and then work out how you can avoid them or do something else.

### **1. Make your own list of things that you feel may trigger you into having a slip or relapse.**

**2. List each situation that may cause you to fall into old ways of drinking or behaving on the left and on the right, list a healthier way of dealing/coping with it (You can list more than one way to cope for each situation).**

**Situation**

**How I will cope with it**

*An old friend asks me to come for a drink to an old haunt*      *Go for a coffee instead*

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### **16.20. Role play**

A lot of your friends or family may want to drink at parties or go out for a drink. If you are having problems with drink then avoiding all the situations where other people are drinking and them offering you a drink is going to be tricky. How will you deal with this? Here is a role play exercise to help you.

Here are tools to help:

- Discuss possible times or events with someone you trust and the things you may find difficult.
- Arrange to update that person afterwards.
- With a friend, or on your own, go through step-by-step the situation.
- Prepare answers to the questions people will ask.
- If you have decided not to drink or are not drinking at the moment picture getting a soft drink.
- Think about those scenarios - do it again, and again, until it all seems natural.
- If you are at a party and the person giving the party is a friend, tell them beforehand that you are not drinking or that you won't be drinking much.

- If you are drinking work through the things to avoid and the situations that will increase the risks of getting into problems.
- Take a friend along for support who knows the situation.
- Eat something before the party.
- Come late. Leave early.
- When you get there, try something non-alcoholic first.
- You can then socialise with a glass in your hand and not stand out. This stops you feeling uncomfortable, and stops people asking "Can I get you something to drink?"

Remember- your drinking or not drinking is less important to other people than you think it is.

Sometimes people will push you to drink or drink more. They might say "Come on, one drink won't hurt"; "Help me celebrate"; "Are you too good to drink with me?"; "It's my birthday/wedding/holiday"; "Fancy another?"; "Go on have another" etc." **How can you respond?**

- Be honest and be serious.
- Speak in a clear and firm voice.
- Don't feel guilty.
- You won't hurt anyone by not drinking a lot or not drinking at all and doing what you want to do.
- You have a right not to drink or to stop. Stand up for your right.
- Suggest something else you can drink or eat. "How about some coffee/juice/dessert?"

If they carry on, ask them to stop. "If you want to be my friend, please don't push me to drink" or "I really don't want another drink". After saying "No" change the subject. "You know, I'm really glad I came to this party. There are a lot of people I'm glad to see" and so on.

*Adapted and edited from Source: SMART Recovery Manual*

### **16.21. Going back to previous ways of behaving**

It's difficult to change the way we do things – to change our behaviour. So sometimes, especially when you are trying something for the first time, you may go back to the way you previously coped with situations and you start drinking in ways that harm you and others. Sometimes people call this 'relapse' but it is better to think of it as you falling into ways of past behaviour like drinking heavily again. This may be due to perhaps something that has gone on in your life. Remember you drink for reasons.

Changing the way you deal with things can get a lot easier with time, especially if you are learning other ways to handle your stress and to have a more balanced life.

#### **Recognise the danger signals**

There may be signs that you can begin to recognise that you are falling into previous patterns of behaviour. These may be:

- Distancing yourself from other people and your support - you feel bored and lonely a lot of the time
- Getting irritated easily - relationships becoming tense
- Thinking you will never be able to sort your drinking out - there's no point in carrying on
- Not working out stresses and problems at the time but letting them build up till they reach a crisis – and then drinking
- Not handling negative feelings such as boredom, loneliness or anger.
- Ignoring your feelings - cravings or urges to drink
- When you're under stress you don't see any other way to cope apart from drinking

#### **Think ahead**

- Think about the old ways of drinking before it happens. Write your feelings down.
- Work out the best way for you to handle these feelings and how you will deal with life after you've had a heavy drinking session.

## **Have a plan**

- Deal with your problems and feelings as they come up. Don't let them build up inside you.
- Set up a routine where you build in healthier habits such as relaxing more, eating more healthily, exercising, and resting and sleeping better.
- Talk to other people you trust – friends, family, an alcohol worker. Get them involved. Let them help.
- Think through your high risk situations and practise dealing with them.
- It is really important to get back on track as soon as possible after a serious drinking session and to learn from what happened leading up to it so that you can avoid it in the future.
- Many people are very hard on themselves if they do go back to previous behaviours. It's important to remember that this is not an easy path and that you are not perfect! Try and work out why it happened.
- Take it seriously – stop, learn what went on and find better ways of coping with it in the future.
- Sit down and try to work out how you were feeling before the drinking happened.
- Think about how you felt before, during and after and write it down.
- Make a plan of how you will handle the situation, feelings, and emotions in a better way when it happens again.
- Call someone you trust and talk about what happened and how you feel.
- Remind yourself that just because you went back to previous ways of dealing with things does not mean that you are a failure.
- Make a list of things that you can do to help yourself get over the feelings you may have after having a slip or relapse.

## **Remember that you can:**

- **control your behaviour**
- **change your drinking**
- **get through this**

## **16.22. Techniques for coping with mental health issues**

You may realise that you have mental health issues and your drinking is increasing the tensions in your life. There may be times when it is getting too much and you are feeling stressed or depressed - try some of these techniques.

### **Self-help for schizophrenia**

Learn to recognise early signs such as:

- Going off your food, feeling anxious or not sleeping
- Other people commenting that you've stopped bothering to change your clothes, clean your home or cook for yourself
- Mild symptoms like feeling a bit suspicious or fearful, worrying about people's motives, starting to hear voices quietly or occasionally, finding it difficult to concentrate

Try to avoid things that make you worse, such as:

- Stressful situations e.g. spending too much time with people
- Using more street drugs or alcohol
- Getting anxious about bills
- Disagreements with family, friends or neighbours

Learn relaxation techniques and make sure you regularly do something you enjoy.

Find ways of controlling your voices

- Spend time with other people.
- Keep busy.
- Listen to a personal stereo (tv and radio also work, but may annoy your family or neighbours).
- Remind yourself that your voices can't harm you.
- Remind yourself that your voices don't have any power over you and can't force you to do anything you don't want to.

- Join a self-help group for people with similar experiences to yours.
- Identify someone you trust to tell you if you are becoming unwell again.
- Learn about schizophrenia and your medication:
  - Talk it over with your nurse, mental health worker or psychiatrist.
  - Ask for written information about your diagnosis and treatment.
  - If your medication is not working well, ask about alternative medications.

#### Look after your body

- Try to eat a balanced diet, with lots of fresh vegetables and fruit.
- Try not to smoke - cigarettes harm your lungs, your heart, your circulation and your stomach.
- Take some regular exercise, even if it's only 20 minutes out walking every day. Regular vigorous exercise (double your pulse rate for 20 minutes 3 times a week) can help improve your mood.
- If there is an inaccurate or abusive item about schizophrenia in the press, a radio talk show or on TV, don't get depressed, get active. Write a letter, e-mail them, phone them up and tell them where they are wrong. It works!

If you want to find out more about mental health problems, you can contact NHS Direct (0845 4647 or [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)) or MIND (0845 766 0163 or [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)) (see chapter 18).

If you want to talk about your feelings in confidence, you can call MIND or Samaritans (08457 90 90 90 or [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org))

## **Self help for depression**

Again, there are a number of things that you can do to improve your mood or feelings.

### **Do you think you might be depressed?**

Ask yourself these questions - over the last two weeks or more:

Have you been feeling a bit 'down'?

Yes/No

Have you lost interest in your usual activities, or do you get less pleasure from the things you used to enjoy, such as:

- going out
- meeting your friends or
- sex?

Yes/No

Have you been feeling unusually restless, irritable, tearful, or unable to relax?

Yes/No

Have you been feeling unusually tired, or have you been having difficulty concentrating?

Yes/No

Have you been feeling worthless or guilty, or been blaming yourself for things that aren't your fault?

Yes/No

Have you noticed any change to your usual sleeping pattern? Perhaps you are finding it hard to get to sleep, or perhaps you're waking up during the night?

Yes/No

Have you noticed changes in your appetite, or your weight, or both?

Yes/No

Has something big happened in your life within the past year, such as losing your job, moving house, a health or relationship problem, or someone dying?

Yes/No

***If you have answered Yes to most of these questions, you may be depressed, and it is worth looking for help.***

There are some things you can do to help yourself if you are depressed.

- Being more active can help to make you feel better and less tired. Sitting around doing nothing just makes things worse.
- Hobbies may help you to express your feelings, which may also help you to feel better.
- Tackling small tasks e.g. house repairs may help you to feel that you have achieved something.
- It often helps to get back into your usual routine and to do more of the things you enjoy.
- Explain to your partner that you are not rejecting them – if you are not showing interest or affection, it's because of how you feel, not because you don't love them any more.

### **16.23. Quiz answers**

**Alcohol is drunk by 90% of adults in England and Wales. TRUE**

Most people in this country drink alcohol. Drinking alcohol is a normal thing to do. It is part of life for most people. It can be enjoyable. It helps us to be sociable. We use it to celebrate. Most people who drink do not have any problems. However, a number of us may get into problems from drinking too much.

**Alcohol is not a drug FALSE**

Alcohol is a drug and can affect your body in a number of ways. Because alcohol is legal some people think it is not a drug.

**Alcohol is a stimulant FALSE**

Alcohol is not a stimulant. It is the opposite. It is a depressant. This means that it can have the affect of slowing down your reactions. It can affect your ability to think clearly so driving is not a good idea when you have had a drink. Some people think it is a stimulant because it seems to make you feel happy at first. What is really happening is that alcohol has an effect on your brain. So it makes you feel less in control.

**Most people develop problems with alcohol**

**FALSE**

Most people use alcohol sensibly. They do not have any problems with alcohol. But a number of us drink in harmful ways at different times. For some this can damage their health. It can also put other people at risk of harm.

**Drinking a small amount daily can be good for your health**

**TRUE**

Research has shown that drinking a small amount of alcohol each day can possibly be good for your health in reducing risks of coronary heart disease and stroke, but only for a very small select group of people i.e. men over 40 and post-menopausal women.

**Drinking alcohol is legal and so it is safe**

**FALSE**

Alcohol is a legal drug. You can forget that the consequences of drinking too much can be a dangerous. If you drink the suggested number of units it can be enjoyed. Those people who go over the suggested level increase the risks to their health.

**Alcohol can be drunk in the home after the age of 5 but can only be bought after 18**

**TRUE**

Alcohol cannot be given to a child under 5, except by a doctor. In the home a child over 5 can drink alcohol. Children over the age of 16 can drink alcohol with food in a restaurant. It is illegal for a person to buy alcohol until the age of 18.

**Alcohol is responsible for the majority of violent crimes**

**FALSE**

Alcohol does not cause crime – people do. Alcohol is also not responsible for the majority of violent crimes. Alcohol is related to and a factor in a lot of criminal activity for example 46% of violent crimes are thought to be carried out by people who have been drinking alcohol (39% for domestic abuse and 58% of stranger violence).

**Alcohol is linked to over 40,000 deaths a year in England & Wales**

**TRUE**

Alcohol is linked to up to 40,000 deaths a year. 22,000 deaths each year are directly linked to alcohol consumption. The World Health Organisation says alcohol is the third highest risk to health.

**Binge drinking is safer than drinking a little alcohol**

**FALSE**

There is no correct way of stating what binge drinking is but a common definition is where you drink over twice the suggested daily number of units. What is clear is that if you drink a lot in one go over a short period of time you are more likely to harm yourself and put yourself and others in danger.

**There are no health risks to drinking**

**FALSE**

Alcohol can affect almost every part of the body. The liver and stomach are the main organs it affects. It can also affect the heart, bones, skin, muscles, the brain and the nerves. Too much alcohol can also increase the risk of mental health problems, sexual problems and cancer.

**Alcohol can cause sudden death in some people**

**TRUE**

Drinking too much alcohol in one go can cause alcohol poisoning. This can cause death if the body cannot cope with it. You can also die from choking on your vomit.

**Alcohol can increase the risk of some cancers**

**TRUE**

Heavy alcohol use has been linked to an increased risk of developing certain cancers. This includes cancer of the mouth, liver, stomach, as well as breast cancer.

**Alcohol cannot affect the baby during pregnancy**

**FALSE**

During pregnancy alcohol in the mother's blood will cross the placenta and can affect the growing baby. If a woman drinks throughout pregnancy there is a greater chance of miscarriage. There is also a greater risk of giving birth to an underweight baby.

There is also the chance of the baby being affected by Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD are a group of problems that can affect a child who has had a mother who has drunk heavily throughout pregnancy. Signs include poor growth, low intelligence, facial appearance and memory issues.

**Alcohol can contribute to weight problems**

**TRUE**

Alcohol is high in calories. Drinking can affect your weight.

**Drinking has no long-term health risks for young people**

**FALSE**

Drinking and getting drunk is seen as something that you do when you are young. Many young people drink a lot at some point in their early lives and most young people will not go on to develop serious problems. However, heavy drinking early in life can lead to problems later in life. There are long-term health risks linked to heavy drinking. The most common problems young people have are the effects of being drunk and having accidents. Young people are more easily affected by alcohol than adults because their bodies are still growing.

**Alcohol has the same effects on men and women**

**FALSE**

Alcohol affects women differently than men. The effects last longer for women. This is because women have more fatty tissue in their bodies. They have less fluid in their body to dilute the alcohol. Alcohol can stay in a woman's body longer than a man's because of the size of the liver.

**The use of alcohol only has an effect on the drinker**

**FALSE**

The use of alcohol affects others – often your family are the first to know that you are having problems with your drinking.

Over a million children have a parent that is a problem drinker. The cost of treating the effects of alcohol misuse puts a huge burden on the health service.

**Mixing alcohol with other drugs can be dangerous**

**TRUE**

The effects of many drugs are greatly increased when taken with alcohol. It is extremely dangerous to take drugs like barbiturates or tranquillisers with alcohol.

**If a healthy woman drinks no more than 2-3 units a day and a healthy man drinks no more than 3-4 units a day they will not experience any great health risks.** **TRUE**

The recommended limits for drinking alcohol are:

- 2-3 units a day or less for a woman
- 3-4 units a day or less for a man

For the majority of people there are no great risks to your health below those limits.

**However this is not the case for all people.** Remember think about the dangers of drinking if:

- You are on medication
- You are vulnerable
- You have mental health problems
- You are taking other illegal drugs
- You are a young person
- You are pregnant

If you do go over those recommended limits you should make sure that you go 2 days without drinking. This will give your body time to recover.