

## Are there any risks to “sensible” drinking?

Just because we drink within the limits does not mean that it is safe. Very little research has been done on older people so we may be mistaken in thinking that these limits apply to everyone.

There are also some particular problems:

- Health problems can make us more susceptible to alcohol
- Balance gets worse with age—even a small amount of alcohol can make you more unsteady and more likely to fall

Alcohol can:

- Add to the effect of some medications, e.g. painkillers or sleeping tablets
- Reduce the effect of others, e.g. medication to thin the blood (Warfarin), this can increase the risk of bleeding or developing a clot or blockage in your bloodstream.
- Damage nearly every part of your body, e.g. the liver, heart muscle, stomach lining
- Affect your mental health, e.g. dementia, confusion, depression, anxiety.



# Alcohol & older people

This leaflet is for those who;

May be worried about their own, or someone else's, drinking levels.

Want to know more about the effects of alcohol as you get older.

**Time to reflect?**

What's your relationship with alcohol?

Concerned you're drinking too much?

Cutting down on alcohol means making healthier choices

Use a scratch card to find out your drinking levels and risks

RETHINK your drink

If you are concerned about your own, or someone else's, alcohol use visit our website for local service information [www.cambsdaat.org](http://www.cambsdaat.org)

NHS  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group

Cambridgeshire County Council

drugandalcohol action:team

Please contact the DAAT for details of alcohol services in Cambridgeshire & local support.

[www.cambsdaat.org](http://www.cambsdaat.org)

Tel: 01223 699680

Email: [daat@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:daat@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)



to work each day.  
family responsibilities, and no pressure to go drinking than for a younger person, fewer  
There may be less pressure to give up  
daily routine and difficult to give up.  
bearable. It may then become part of our  
alcohol to make these difficulties more  
may be painful and it can be tempting to use  
to boredom and depression. Physical illness  
getting around and social isolation can lead  
Bereavement, physical ill-health, difficulty  
the first time in later life.  
About a third of older people with drinking  
problems (mainly women) develop them for

## How might an older person develop an alcohol problem?



## For further information on 'What is an alcohol unit' Visit: [www.drinkaware.co.uk](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk)

**How much is it safe to drink?**

The more you drink, the more likely it is that alcohol will harm your health; BUT there are “sensible” levels of drinking which, for most people, are unlikely to be harmful.

These are roughly:  
14 units of alcohol a week for both men and women

However, the changes mentioned above mean that safe drinking levels for older people are probably less than this.

Many drinks now show the number of units they contain on the bottle. But to give you some idea:  
• a pint of light beer (4%) or a double whisky both contain 2 units  
• A 75cl bottle of wine contains 8-10 units, so a glass of wine might contain anything from 1 to 3 units depending on its size

Weekly limits can be misleading. If just a quarter of the recommended weekly amount is drunk over a matter of hours, this is more likely to be harmful.

**What's different about alcohol for older people?**

As we get older, our bodies change. On the outside we notice lines, wrinkles, extra weight.  
On the inside we:  
• Lose muscle  
• Gain fat  
• Break down alcohol more slowly

This means that we become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol. We also react more slowly and tend to lose our sense of balance.  
So, even if we drink the same amount of alcohol, as we get older it is likely to affect us more than younger people.

