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**About The Alcohol Service**

Our service is for people who have trouble with alcohol use or who are affected by problems to do with alcohol. The service is free to residents of Hammersmith and Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster.

We offer advice, information and counselling to reduce the harm caused by alcohol and support people to reduce or stop their drinking. We also support families and carers and older people who are affected by alcohol use.

**How to reduce the harms of alcohol use**

**If you regularly drink more than the recommended amount of 14 units of alcohol each week you may damage your health.**

* You can reduce the risks to your health by keeping within the 14 unit limit. This is about the same as 6 pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine.
* You should also try to spread your drinking across three or more days a week.
* If you are pregnant, or think you could become pregnant, it is better not to drink alcohol at all to protect your baby’s health.

You may find it helpful to keep a diary of your alcohol use to record how many drinks you are having in a day and the reasons why you may be drinking. Also record what time of day you are drinking, and why? Are you drinking because of withdrawal symptoms? Because you are lonely? Stressed? Down?

**If you find it difficult to reduce and/or stop drinking, please get in touch with us for help.**

**How much alcohol is in your drinks?**

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

 **How do I know if I have a serious problem with alcohol?**

The most serious alcohol problem is dependence, sometimes known as ‘alcoholism’. You may be dependent on alcohol if you have experienced three or more of these problems at the same time during the past year:

* You have had a strong desire to drink alcohol that you can’t control.
* You have had unpleasant withdrawal symptoms when you stop drinking or reduce your alcohol use.
* You need to drink more alcohol to achieve the same effect as before – called ‘tolerance’.
* Drinking alcohol has become more important to you than your other activities and interests.
* You continue to drink alcohol even though you know it is harming your health.

**How to reduce your alcohol use safely**

If you drink daily, your body can become dependent on the effects of alcohol. When you stop drinking, your body reacts badly and you may experience very unpleasant withdrawal symptoms, such as:

* tremors
* anxiety
* nausea and/or vomiting
* headache
* increased heart rate
* sweating
* irritability
* confusion
* problems with sleep - insomnia/nightmares

Some people may experience a very severe withdrawal syndrome called *Delirium Tremens* whose symptoms include:

* extreme confusion and agitation
* fever
* seizures
* hallucinations - seeing hearing or feeling things that don't exist outside of your mind. These can include:
	+ itching, burning, spiders crawling across your skin
	+ hearing non-existent sounds, voices or music
	+ seeing non-existent images, televisions, or people

**Manage your symptoms safely**

***Go slow***

To minimise withdrawal symptoms, you should reduce your alcohol intake slowly over a period of time. You should reduce no more than 2 units over two days, or one unit per day.

***Manage morning symptoms***

Symptoms may be worse in the mornings as you will have less alcohol in your blood. If you normally have an alcoholic drink in the morning, you should continue to do so, but not drink as much.

***Stabilise your symptoms***

It is important to feel as comfortable as possible when reducing the amount of alcohol you drink. Be aware of how your body is reacting to the lack of alcohol. If your hands are shaking and/or you are sweaty then your body is telling you it needs alcohol. Take a small amount of alcohol, which should stabilise your withdrawal symptoms after around 20 minutes.

You should not let your withdrawal symptoms become noticeable or uncomfortable or they may lead to more serious problems like seizures, fits or hallucinations.

**You don’t need to manage alone – we can help.**

**Get help and advice**

Please contact us for advice on how to plan your alcohol reduction and how to measure your units so you can reduce safely.

**If you experience severe symptoms, including a seizure, a high fever, hallucinations, and heart disturbances call 111 for immediate help.**

**For life threatening emergencies call 999**

If you have had seizures or hallucinations before, or suffer from epilepsy, please contact **The Alcohol Service**. It may be safest for you to be supported to stop using alcohol at a detox unit, where we can monitor your health and keep you safe.

**Contact us**

Call: **0800 0147440**

Email: thealcoholservice.info@cgl.org.uk

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

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

Twitter@Alcohol\_Service

***Coronavirus and our support***

*At these troubling times we are still here to support and help you, but we are working in different ways to keep you safe. Why not join our open Zoom Coffee Mornings to find out more?*