



#48 in a series of Health Bulletins on issues of pressing interest to all New Yorkers

How Much Is Too Much?



**Most adults drink alcohol safely.
For some, it's a trap.**



• Available in Spanish and Chinese: call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health
• Disponible en español: llame al 311 o visite nyc.gov/health
• 需要中文服務 - 可電 311 或造訪網址 nyc.gov/health

How Much Is Too Much?

- **For men:** More than 4 drinks on one occasion, or more than 14 a week.
- **For women and people 65 and older:** More than 3 drinks on one occasion, or more than 7 a week.

What is 1 drink?



A 12-oz. glass, bottle, or can of beer or ale



A 5-oz. glass of wine, or a 3.5-oz. glass of fortified wine



A 1.5-oz. “shot” of distilled liquor or brandy (straight or in a mixed drink)

The Risks of Excessive Drinking

Excessive drinking is unhealthy, and increases the risk of:

- Cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver.
- Hepatitis.
- Osteoporosis.
- Hypertension.
- Enlarged heart or weakening of the heart muscle.
- Cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, breast, and colon.
- Weakened immune system.
- Pneumonia and other infections.
- Accidents and injuries.
- Committing or being the victim of violence.
- Depression, dementia, and other mental disorders.
- Suicide.



Some People Shouldn't Drink

People shouldn't drink *at all* when:

- Driving or operating machinery.
- Pregnant or trying to become pregnant.
- Caring for children or others.
- They have a personal history of alcohol or drug addiction.
- Taking prescription or over-the-counter medications that interact with alcohol.
- Under legal drinking age.
 - Children and adolescents who drink are at much higher risk for motor-vehicle crashes and alcohol-related brain damage.
 - The earlier people start drinking, the more likely they are to become addicted as adults.



You should be *extra cautious* about drinking if you have:

- A family history of alcoholism or drug addiction.
- Certain illnesses, such as diabetes, congestive heart failure, and long-term liver, stomach, or pancreas problems.
- A history of depression.
- A psychiatric illness.

Alcoholism Is a Disease

- Alcoholism, or alcohol dependence, is a disease that usually gets worse unless it is treated. Symptoms include:
 - **Craving** – a strong urge to drink.
 - **Loss of control** – being unable to stop drinking.
 - **Physical dependence** – withdrawal symptoms (nausea, sweating, shakiness, anxiety).
 - **Increased tolerance** – the need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to feel its effects.
 - **Blackouts** – forgetting what happens when drinking.

You don't have to be an alcoholic to have a problem.

- A drinking problem is *any* level of drinking that harms the drinker, jeopardizes the drinker's well-being, or places others at risk.
- Even moderate drinking can sometimes be a problem.
 - Taking any amount of alcohol with some medications can be dangerous.
 - Even one drink a day can accelerate liver damage in people with hepatitis.

Problem Drinking Is Treatable

- Looking honestly at your own drinking can be difficult. This is called “denial” and is part of the problem.
- Many treatment options are available. For help and information:
 - Talk to your doctor or a substance abuse counselor.
 - Call 1-800-LifeNet (see More Information).
 - Call Alcoholics Anonymous or go to a meeting.

If someone you care about has a problem:

- Encourage the person to get help.
- Take care of *yourself* – consider a support group such as Al-Anon or Alateen.

Don't give up!

People can and do get better, every day.

Recovery is possible.



More Information and Help

- Call 1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638) or call 311 and ask for LifeNet for help with alcohol or other substance abuse problems.
- **Alcoholics Anonymous:** www.nyintergroup.org or 212-647-1680.
- **Al-Anon and Alateen:** www.nycalanon.org or 212-941-0094.
- **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information:** www.samsha.org or 1-800-729-6686.

**DIAL
311**

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Do You Have a Drinking Problem?

Take the CAGE Test

Have you ever:

Yes No

1 Thought you should...
Cut down on your drinking?

2 Become...
Annoyed when asked to stop drinking?

3 Felt scared, bad, or...
Guilty about your drinking?

4 Taken an...
Eye-opener drink to feel better
in the morning?

YES to 1 or 2 Questions = Possible Problem

YES to 3 or 4 Questions = Probable Dependence



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New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

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**For Non-Emergency NYC Services
Telephone Interpretation in 170 Languages**