Joint Health Command

Low Risk Drinking

What is ‘low-risk’ drinking?

National guidelines were developed in 2009 to provide information to the Australian community about alcohol-related risk. The guidelines take into consideration the risk of alcohol related harm occurring in the short-term and in the long-term, and advise that:

- There is no ‘safe’ or ‘no-risk’ drinking level.
- For healthy men and women, low risk drinking is up to two standard drinks a day, with no more than four standard drinks on any single occasion.
- In the short term, the risk to people’s health and social well-being comes from occasional drinking episodes that are confined into a single day. Short term harms include injuries from violence, accidents, falls, having unprotected sex, and alcohol poisoning.
- In the long term, the risk to people’s health, mental health and social well-being is associated with regular and repeated daily drinking, defined by the total number of standard drinks per week. Long term harms include diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and brain damage.
- Even at quite low levels of consumption, there is a risk of harm. For instance, when drinking occasions are frequent (e.g. nearly every day), for men and women who always drink only two drinks or less on an occasion, the lifetime risk of hospitalisation for alcohol-related injury is around 1 in 10.
- In some situations the effect of alcohol consumption increases the immediate risk of harm and could endanger the life of the drinker and/or the lives of other people. In these situations, not drinking is the safest option. This includes:
  - taking part in activities that require a high level of attention, skill or concentration, such as driving, water activities, snow sports, flying an aircraft or operating heavy machinery,
  - supervising other people taking part in these activities, or
  - supervising children.
- It is also important to note that a level of impairment continues for some time even after blood alcohol concentration has returned to zero.
- For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, or who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

Drinking Guidelines

- It is important to note that drink serving sizes are often more than one standard drink. There are no common glass sizes used in Australia.
- The label on an alcoholic drink container tells you the number of standard drinks in the container.

Celebrating safely

Sometimes people drink more than they had intended and go beyond low risk drinking levels. This might happen on special occasions, such as arriving home from a deployment or when celebrating a promotion. Here are some practical strategies for celebrating safely and reducing potential risks associated with alcohol use:

- Have a plan for where you are going, who you will be with, how much you are going to drink, and how you will get home.
- Start with a non-alcoholic drink to quench your thirst before you start drinking alcohol, and be sure to eat something before you start drinking.
- Food in the stomach slows down the rate at which alcohol can be absorbed into your bloodstream.
- Drink one drink at a time, pace yourself, and drink slowly.
- Do something else while you’re drinking, such as playing pool or dancing.
- Don’t leave your drinks unattended.
- Look out for your mates, if they look like they’ve had too much or are getting difficult to handle, try to get them to a safe place. Make an agreement with your mates that you will look out for each other.
- Drink water or non-alcoholic drinks between alcoholic drinks and before you go to sleep.
Tips for cutting down

If you are concerned about the level you are drinking and would like to try to cut down, even just for a while, here are some tips that might help:

1. **Identify the good reasons for cutting down.**
Think of some good reasons for cutting down your alcohol consumption. These reasons might include losing weight, avoiding hangovers, having a clearer head and better memory, or improving your health and fitness. Choose some reasons that make sense to you.

2. **Set some goals.**
Pick a day when you plan to start cutting down and set your daily drinking goals each week. Then record your drinking, in a drinking diary, to help work out whether you’re on track to meet your goals. If you don’t achieve your goals, work out some practical strategies to help you next time.

3. **Be aware of high-risk times.**
There will be times when you will find cutting down difficult, no matter how much you want to change. Common high-risk times might be after work, at a party, watching sports events, or when you feel lonely, stressed or depressed.

4. **Manage the high-risk times.**
Ways of coping with high-risk times include planning to do other things at times when you would usually drink, making sure you eat before drinking and alternating non-alcoholic drinks with alcoholic drinks, switching to low-alcohol drinks or just avoiding high-risk places and people. Think now about practical and sensible ways to deal with high-risk times. Then, on a daily basis, think about each of your high-risk times and imagine how you will manage those times using these ideas.

5. **Identify someone you trust to support you.**
Often people find it is easier to cut down if they have someone they can talk to and be honest with and who will support their decision. This person might be your partner, a friend, or perhaps a colleague who also wants to cut down. Your doctor or other health professional can also support you.

6. **Stick to your goals.**
Some habits are difficult to break. Using the tips on this sheet will help you. Talk to your support person to help you get through the times when you are finding it hard to stick to your goals. Each time you stop yourself from doing something by habit you are another step closer to breaking that habit altogether. Your cravings will pass more easily if you’re occupied doing something else.

**What is your level of risk?**
The most widely used screen for alcohol use in Australia is called the alcohol use disorders identification test (AUDIT). The AUDIT is also used consistently by ADF health providers to assist them to make decisions about appropriate treatment options for members using alcohol in excess of low risk levels.

You can complete the AUDIT on your own drinking behaviour to work out your level of risk by using the [DVA Right Mix assessment tool](https://www.adf.gov.au/resources/alcohol-use-disorders-identification-test-audit).

If your score is 8 or more, you are drinking in excess of low risk levels and should seek further advice and support.

You may also wish to discuss things with a close friend or family member who you trust to be supportive. Sometimes it can really help to share a problem and get a different perspective on it by talking it over.

**Where to seek help**

In an emergency situation, call 000.

Your chain of command is a primary resource that can provide advice, referral and support. You can also contact your local ADF Health Centre, Mental Health Professional, Social Worker, Chaplain or the Duty Officer/Officer of the Day for immediate assistance and referrals.

The ADF Mental Health All-hours Support Line (ASL) is a confidential telephone service for ADF members and their families available 24/7 on 1800 628 036 or if calling from overseas +61 2 9425 3878.

If you are away from base, or for out-of-hours assistance, you can call 1800 IMSICK to locate the nearest support.

Navy members can also see their Alcohol and Drug Program Advisor (ADPA) for further assistance.

**Other Mental Health Resources**

**Defence Family Helpline (1800 624 608)**


The Defence Family Helpline is your first point of call for support, information and connection with your community. The Helpline is available 24/7 for ADF Members and their families, and is staffed by qualified human services professionals including social workers and psychologists.

You can also email the Helpline on DefenceFamilyHelpline@defence.gov.au and receive a response within 24 hours.

**Chaplains** are connected to all units in Australia and can provide support and appropriate referrals.

**Lifeline (131 114).** If you, or a friend, need to talk to someone about a problem immediately, you can call Lifeline for the cost of a local call.

**Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service (VVCS).** This 24-hour service is available to veterans of all deployments and their families on 1800 011 046.