



# Alcohol

Alcohol is the most widely used recreational drug in Australia. It has long been used by humans for its intoxicating effects which have been well studied and researched. The active drug in all alcoholic drinks is called ethanol, which is produced by fermenting sugars and starches. Pure alcohol has no taste or colour, it is the added ingredients and the way that it is produced which makes the final product.

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant, which means the effects inhibit certain brain functions rather than necessarily 'making you feel depressed'. It slows down coordination, concentration and reflexes so that people are not able to react as quickly as when sober. Many people wrongly believe that alcohol is a stimulant because when used in small amounts its effects are relaxing and people often feel sociable, confident and excited. Younger people especially, feel less of the sedative effects of alcohol.

Intoxication occurs quickly as alcohol only takes a few minutes to reach the brain. Eating food will slow down the rate of alcohol absorption but will not prevent drunkenness; all the alcohol will reach the bloodstream. On the other hand, sobering up takes time. It takes the liver approximately one hour to process the alcohol of one standard drink. (A standard drink is a 'shot' or 30ml of spirits, 100ml of wine or a midi of full strength beer). Nothing can speed up the process of sobering up. Drinking water or coffee, vomiting, fresh air, exercise and a cold shower may make you feel better but will not reduce how much alcohol is in your system.

## **General effects of alcohol**

The following effects of alcohol depend on many factors like your age, gender, weight, general health, tolerance, how much and what and how quickly you drink. It is not just the individual physical factors that will influence the effect that alcohol has, it is also your mood and environment that play a role. For example if you feel depressed on your own at home, the feelings will more than likely be intensified if you consume alcohol.

## **Effects on sports performance**

Alcohol use impacts negatively on sports performance. Using alcohol before exercise or sport affects your balance and steadiness, reaction time, hand-eye coordination, fine and complex motor skills and decision making effectiveness. Binge drinking after sport also affects general recovery processes like speedy re-hydration, as the body has already lost fluids through sweating. It also delays the repair of soft tissue injuries that may be sustained during exercise and disturbs regular sleep patterns which help with increasing energy and reducing stress.

## Re Balance Your Lifestyle

### Immediate effects:

- Relaxation
- Reduced concentration
- Lack of coordination and slower reflexes
- Loss of inhibitions and more confidence
- Slurred speech and blurred vision
- Intensified moods for example, sad, happy ,angry
- Confusion
- Poor muscle control
- Frequent urination (causing dehydration)
- Nausea, vomiting, sleep
- At high doses – memory loss and blackouts
- At high doses – unconsciousness and death

### Long term effects:

Drinking excessive amounts regularly over time is likely to cause physical, emotional or social problems which may include:

- Poor diet
- Stomach problems
- Skin problems
- Organ damage (heart, liver)
- High cancer risk (breast, digestive system)
- Depression/anxiety
- Dependence
- Concentration and memory problems
- Early onset of dementia (alcohol related brain damage)
- Relationship problems
- Poor work performance
- Financial difficulties

### Low risk drinking

Guidelines for low risk drinking have been released by the National Health and Medical Research Council in 2009. The recommendation of no more than two standard drinks in any one day reduces the harm of accidents and injury in the short term and the risk of disease in the long term to less than 1 in 100. This applies to both men and women, though after two drinks the risks for women increase significantly for every extra drink consumed.

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### Useful links

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre [www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au](http://www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au)

Australian Drug Foundation [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)

NSW Health [www.whatrudoing2urself.com](http://www.whatrudoing2urself.com)

Drinkwise [www.drinkwise.com.au](http://www.drinkwise.com.au)

NHMRC Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking 2009  
NDARC What's the score? The Facts on Alcohol, Drugs and Sport  
NDARC Fact sheet Alcohol ADF Alcohol How Drugs Affect You