

# Australian Alcohol Guidelines

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Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council published updated [Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks From Drinking Alcohol \(Australian Alcohol Guidelines\)](#) in December 2020.

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines provide information on the health risks from alcohol use, and advice on how to keep these risks low, based on the most current scientific evidence.

You can read more about the Guidelines and the evidence behind them below, or at [nhmrc.gov.au/alcohol](https://nhmrc.gov.au/alcohol).

## Guideline for healthy adults

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that healthy adults should have no more than 10 standard alcoholic drinks a week to reduce their risk of developing cancer and other diseases. Healthy adults should have no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day to reduce their risk of an injury from alcohol use. The less you drink the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.

**If you drink, have no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day to reduce your risk of diseases and injury.**

If you drink alcohol, sticking to this guideline will keep your risk of harm from alcohol low. But it will not remove your risk entirely. Healthy adults who drink alcohol within this guideline have less than a 1 in 100 chance of dying from a disease or injury caused by alcohol.

The guideline for healthy adults is based on evidence of the following:

- Drinking alcohol increases the risk of many types of cancer, including bowel and breast cancer. Even drinking at low levels increases cancer risk, but the more a person drinks, the greater their cancer risk.
- Alcohol can cause high blood pressure, increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- Alcohol can damage the liver and cause liver disease.
- Drinking alcohol can cause or worsen mental health problems.

- People are more likely to be injured or hurt other people when using alcohol, including through car accidents, falls or assaults.

For some adults, drinking alcohol involves higher risks.

- For people aged 18–25 years, drinking alcohol can impact brain development. People's brains are still developing until around 25 years of age. Injuries from alcohol are also more common in this age group.
- People older than 60 years are less able to process alcohol. They are also more likely to have a chronic condition, which alcohol can make worse.
- People with a family history of an alcohol use disorder may have a higher risk of developing an alcohol use disorder themselves.
- People who take medicine or use illicit drugs can be at risk of serious harm if alcohol alters the effect of the medicine or drug, or vice versa.
- People with health conditions, such as liver disease, hepatitis B and C, epilepsy, obesity or mental health conditions, which alcohol can make worse.
- Women are more affected by alcohol than men. At low levels of drinking (within the guideline for healthy adults), this only makes a small difference to women's risk of diseases from alcohol compared to men. However, women drinking at higher levels are at greater risk of diseases from alcohol compared to men drinking at the same levels.
- Men are more at risk than women of short-term harms from alcohol, including road crashes, falls and self-harm.

## What is a standard drink?

The number of standard drinks in a serve of alcohol depends on the alcohol volume (strength) and the size of the serve. A standard drink equates to 10 grams of pure alcohol.

- One small glass (285ml middy or pot) of full-strength beer contains 1.1 standard drinks.
- An average sized glass of wine in a restaurant (150ml) contains about 1.6 standard drinks for white wine, and 1.8 standard drinks for red wine.
- One nip (30ml shot glass) of spirits contains 1 standard drink.



**WINE**  
100ml  
13% alcohol



**SPARKLING WINE**  
100ml  
13% alcohol



**SPIRITS**  
30ml nip (shot glass)  
40% alcohol



**CIDER**  
285ml glass  
(pot/middy)  
4.9% alcohol



**BEER (FULL STRENGTH)**  
285ml glass  
(pot/middy)  
4.9% alcohol



**BEER (LIGHT)**  
425ml glass  
(schooner)  
2.7% alcohol

Every alcohol product in Australia is required to be labelled with the number of standard drinks that it contains. For more information on standard drinks see FARE's information sheet *Keeping track of standard drinks* or visit [fare.org.au/resources](http://fare.org.au/resources).

## Guideline if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you should not drink any alcohol to prevent the risk of damage to the developing baby.

**If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you should not drink alcohol.**

The guideline for when pregnant or planning a pregnancy is based on evidence of the following:

- If alcohol is consumed during pregnancy, the developing baby also consumes the alcohol. The developing baby's blood gets about the same level of alcohol as the blood of the person consuming the alcohol.
- A developing baby's brain starts growing very early in pregnancy, often before knowledge of the pregnancy.
- Drinking alcohol in pregnancy can damage the baby's brain which can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum disorder (FASD). FASD leads to many lifelong problems including learning and behavioural challenges.
- The risk of damage to the developing baby increases the more often alcohol is consumed, and the larger the amount consumed.
- This does not mean the developing baby will always be damaged if alcohol is consumed during pregnancy. Every pregnancy is different and there are a range of factors that influence the risk for the developing baby.

## Guideline if you are breastfeeding

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for your baby.

**If you are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for your baby.**

This guideline for when breastfeeding is based on evidence of the following:

- If alcohol is consumed when breastfeeding, the alcohol crosses into the breastmilk.
- If the baby is breastfed while there is still alcohol in the breastmilk, the baby also drinks the alcohol.
- This can cause the baby to have problems feeding and sleeping.
- A baby's brain keeps developing after it is born. This means a baby's brain is more sensitive to damage from alcohol than an adult brain.

## Guideline for children and young people under 18

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that children and people under 18 years of age should not have any alcohol, to reduce their risk of injury and other harms to their health. Alcohol can affect children's and young people's brain development and is more likely to cause them harm. There is no safe level of drinking for children and people under 18.

**Children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol.**

The guideline for children and young people is based on evidence of the following:

- People under 18 are more sensitive to alcohol, which can affect their brain development. People's brains are still developing until around 25 years of age.
- Alcohol increases risk-taking behaviour, and can lead to unsafe sex, car accidents, injuries and assaults.
- Alcohol can make mental health problems worse and increase the risk of self-harm and suicide.
- Alcohol use at a young age increases the risk of problems with alcohol in early adulthood.

## Where can I find help?

For help cutting back on alcohol, you can speak to a doctor. You can find a local GP at [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au) or you can call 1800 022 222.

You can also find help from the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015.

For more support services, see FARE's information sheet *Alcohol support services* or visit [fare.org.au/support](http://fare.org.au/support).