

ALCOHOL... IS IT JUST A DRINK?



The facts on what alcohol actually does.

Most people drink responsibly most of the time — here's what's worth knowing either way.

Most people drink alcohol responsibly most of the time. However, some people may consume alcohol at a level that increases their risk of harm, including injury and disease.

START HERE

WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Alcohol is any beverage containing ethanol — one of the oldest known drugs, used by humans for centuries. It's also known by many other names, including grog, booze, plonk and brew.

The basics

What it is

Ethanol, produced by the fermentation of carbohydrates by yeasts — it can even occur naturally in overripe, rotting fruit.

Why drinks differ

Beer, wine and spirits differ because of the methods and ingredients used to produce them.

In cooking

Most (but not all) of the alcohol burns or vaporises away during cooking.

On the body

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant — it slows down messages to and from the brain.

KNOW THE FACTS

STANDARD DRINKS

Alcohol is measured in standard drinks. A drink is often much more than one standard drink — bottles and cans are labelled with how many standard drinks they contain, so you can keep track of how much you're having.

1 standard drink = 10g of alcohol

Check the label on your drink — it's rarely just one.

CHECK IN

WHAT ALCOHOL DOES

Alcohol causes a wide range of effects, starting within 5–10 minutes of drinking and lasting roughly as long as it takes the alcohol to leave your body.

Effects to be aware of

Slurred speech

Nausea

Drowsiness

Vomiting

Poisoning

Relaxation

Impaired movement

Impaired thinking

Talkativeness

Altered mood

Unconsciousness / passing out

Myth-buster

Drinking coffee, fresh air, sweating, vomiting or cold showers will **not** speed up how quickly alcohol leaves your bloodstream. Only time does that.

KNOW THE FACTS

BLOOD ALCOHOL CONCENTRATION (BAC)

The level of alcohol in your bloodstream is called your Blood Alcohol Concentration, or BAC. A BAC of 0.05% (“point-oh-five”) means there is 0.05g of alcohol in every 100ml of blood.

Why it differs between people

- Alcohol is water-soluble, so it spreads through the water in your body
- The same number of drinks gives a different BAC in different people
- Women often have a higher BAC than men after the same amount, because men typically have more water in their body to dilute it

How the body clears it

- Alcohol is metabolised almost entirely by the liver
- The liver can process about one standard drink per hour
- 10 standard drinks means you’re likely to still have alcohol in your body 10 hours later

KNOW THE FACTS

RISKS

Alcohol use is associated with a number of health risks.

Alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol combined with other drugs — including legal ones like caffeine, antihistamines, or prescription medications — can interact in unexpected ways and cause unintended side effects.

Accident, injury and driving

Alcohol affects your ability to think clearly and drive safely, and increases the chance of falls, burns, drownings and machinery-related accidents. Never drive or operate heavy machinery until the effects have fully passed. Too much alcohol in one sitting can also cause poisoning.

Pregnancy

Alcohol is known to cause birth defects and brain damage, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). It is safest to avoid alcohol completely during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

Tolerance and dependency

Repeated use over time can cause tolerance (needing more to feel the same effect) and dependency (a strong desire to keep drinking despite negative consequences, with difficulty stopping). Withdrawal can include shaking hands, increased heart rate, sweating and nausea — always seek medical advice about managing alcohol withdrawal safely.

Long-term health

Long-term use can cause serious health problems, including various cancers (stomach and bowel, mouth and throat), brain damage and stroke, liver disease (fatty liver, cirrhosis), depression, anxiety, psychosis, reduced fertility, impotence, and more.

KNOW THE FACTS

THE LAW

Alcohol laws differ between Australian states and territories.

The law, in brief

Buying alcohol

Legal age to buy alcohol is 18.

Underage, supervised

In some states, under-18s may drink with a parent or guardian's permission.

Sale & supply rules

Some states restrict take-away sale hours, open containers in public, and licensing.

Behind the wheel

Fully licensed drivers must stay under 0.05 BAC. Learners and P Platers must have 0.00.

Laws differ between states and territories and can change — check your local jurisdiction for current detail.

REACH OUT

HELP AND INFO

If you'd like to speak to someone, local treatment services can support you and your family, and answer questions about alcohol, withdrawal, and recovery.

- Medicines Line — **1300 MEDICINE**
- Get the effects by txt — text the name of the drug to **0439 TELL ME**
- Parents, Elders, and trusted friends
- GPs and pharmacists
- Your Local Alcohol and Other Drug Service
- Fire, Ambulance, Police — **000**
- Lifeline Australia — **13 11 14**
- Kids Helpline — **1800 55 1800**
- Poisons Information Centre — **13 11 26**
- Family Drug Support (24/7) — **fds.org.au** or **1300 368 186**
- CODE — Community Online Drug Education
- **tuneinnotout.com** — youth wellbeing website
- **fasdhub.org.au** — Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Worried about your drinking, or someone else's?

Support is available. Visit **alwf.org.au/support** for options, or call Lifeline: **13 11 14**.



alwf.org.au

A resource from the Australian Lions Wellbeing Foundation, adapted from the Tune In Not Out alcohol education series.