



HOW YOU CAN CHANGE YOUR DRINKING HABITS TO REDUCE HEALTH RISK

A Self-help Booklet



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This booklet focuses on helping people change their drinking habits in order to prevent alcohol-related health problems.



People who want to learn more about alcohol and health



People who are concerned about their drinking

For whom is this booklet?



Occasional/social drinkers and even people who are drinking smaller amounts of alcohol but may already be at risk



People whose family or friends have a drinking problem

It does not intend to replace doctor's assessment or treatment for people with severe alcohol use disorder*.

***Note**

Referring to 'alcohol dependence' (also known as alcohol addiction and alcoholism) in this booklet. The signs and symptoms of alcohol dependence include a strong craving for alcohol; the inability to limit drinking; and suffering from withdrawal symptoms when drinking is stopped, etc.



To drink or NOT to drink? Rethink, for your Health!

Do you consider your drinking a problem?

Are you at risk of health problems or other alcohol-related harms?

Do you want to cut down or stop drinking to protect yourself and others?

This self-help booklet can help you understand more about your drinking habits and give you some ideas about how to make changes in your drinking for better health.



Do you need to do something about your alcohol use?

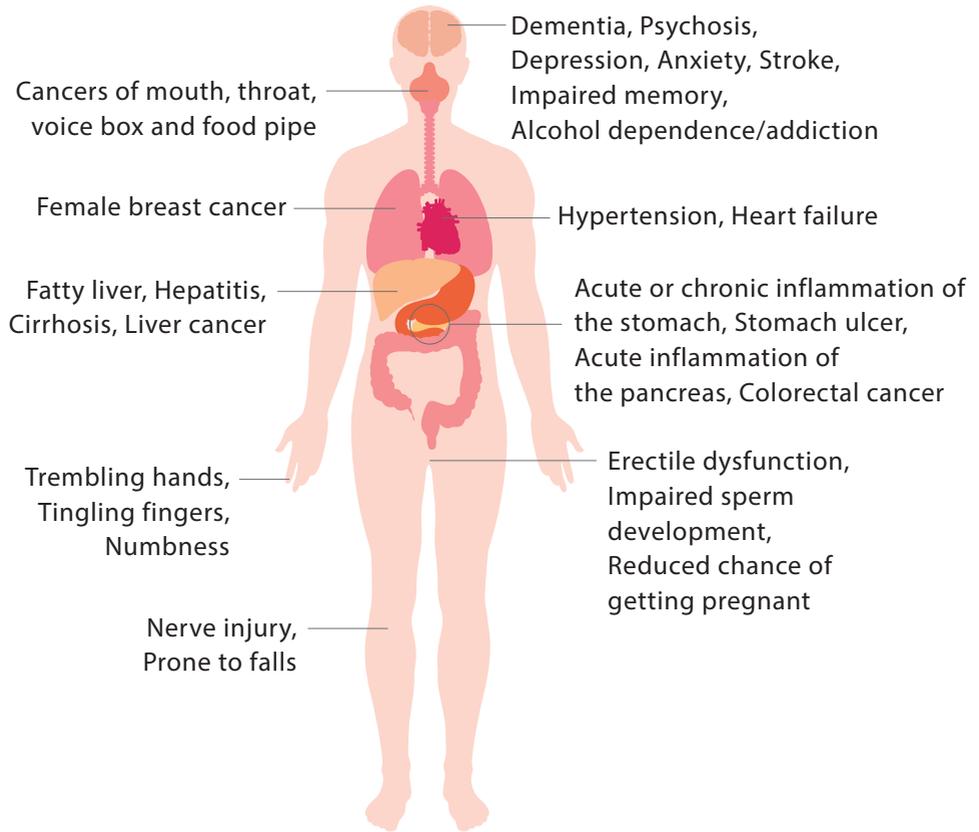
First, you need to be informed about the health risk of any amount of drinking. Alcohol is a toxic substance, which affects many parts of your body. Alcohol drinking **increases the risk of more than 200 health conditions (diseases and injuries)**. Of note, alcohol is classified as **Group 1 carcinogen (cancer-causing to humans)**, the same group as tobacco smoke, asbestos and ionising radiation, by the International Agency for Research on Cancer of the World Health Organization, because there is strong evidence in humans that drinking any type of alcoholic beverages (such as wine, beer and spirits) increases the risk of at least 7 types of cancer. The more you drink, the higher the chance you are to get these health problems.

References:

- IARC Working Group on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans. Personal habits and indoor combustions. Volume 100 E. A review of human carcinogens. IARC Monogr Eval Carcinog Risks Hum. 2012;100(Pt E):1-538.
- World Health Organization. Global status report on alcohol and health 2018. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.

Your Health or Your Drink?

Harms you may risk if you choose to drink.



Alcohol is a proven cancer-causing agent, belonging to the same group as tobacco smoke, asbestos and ionising radiation.

References:

- Babor TF, Higgins-Biddle JC, Saunders JB and Monteiro MG. AUDIT The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Guidelines for Use in Primary Care. Second Edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2001.
- World Health Organization. Dementia. [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 Sep 2. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/dementia>
- World Health Organization. Lexicon of alcohol and drug terms. Geneva: World Health Organization; 1994.

More to know:



Alcohol can impair your vision, concentration, reactions, and self-control ability, etc, and therefore increases the risk of endangering yourself and others. Further drinking of alcohol can suppress brain function and can be lethal in some cases.



Alcohol in pregnant mothers' blood can pass to the babies through the umbilical cord and can affect the health of unborn babies.



Alcohol interacts with or affects the metabolism of many drugs, which may result in change of toxicity of the drugs.



If you are a drinker, the best way to avoid these kinds of health problems and adverse effects is to cut down on the frequency and quantity of your drinking step by step, and ultimately stop drinking.

Reference:

Change for Health website. Hong Kong SAR: Department of Health.
https://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol_aware/facts/minimising/index.html

III

Myths of drinking alcohol



Alcohol has no effect on me as I seldom get drunk?



Whether you get drunk or not, your liver works to break down most of the alcohol absorbed. But the process of breaking alcohol down generates harmful by-products which in turn cause damage to your liver and other organs. Symptoms of organ damage are not obvious in the early stages.



Alcohol flush reactions mean better tolerance to alcohol?



Many Asians have alcohol flush due to deficiency of an enzyme which helps to break down harmful by-products of alcohol. The flush is simply a sign of harmful by-products building up in your body and nothing else.



Drinking can help me sleep?



Although alcohol may make you sleepy, the sleep induced is of shorter duration and poorer quality. Moreover, study suggests that tolerance to alcohol's sedative effects develops rapidly. As tolerance increases, so does your alcohol intake.



Drinking can lift up my mood and relieve stress?



Alcohol is a strong depressant of the central nervous system. When you first start to drink, you may feel more relaxed, but in the long run alcohol can contribute to feelings of depression and anxiety and make stress harder to deal with. This is because regular, heavy drinking interferes with chemicals in your brain and they are necessary for good mental health and functioning.



Tea can lessen the effects of alcohol?



While fluids rehydrate the body and lower the blood alcohol concentration, the absorbed alcohol still needs to be dealt with by your liver.



It's okay for children or young people to try a sip once in a while?



As the brain does not stop developing until the early 20s, drinking alcohol at an early age may interfere with healthy brain development and functioning. Studies have shown that children who were allowed to drink were at increased risk of having drinking problems when they grew up. You would not want to subject your loved ones to the harmful effects of alcohol.



Occasional binge drinking isn't harmful?



Even occasionally, drinking excessive amounts can be dangerous. Binge drinking even on one occasion can result in misbehaviours, imposing harms to self and others. Side effects such as acute alcohol poisoning and acute inflammation of the pancreas may be dangerous. Even though apparent physical harms may not show up at once, binge drinking may have already affected various organs of your body.

Reference:

"DRINK or NOT DRINK? Be Informed if you Drink!" booklet. Hong Kong SAR: Department of Health; 2019.

IV

Minimise the amount if you choose to drink

Remember, the less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol. Following the simple rules below can reduce the risk to your health and the possibility you may hurt someone else:

- To lower health risks for various diseases including cancers, it is best to cut down step by step and stop drinking ultimately.
- If you choose to drink, limit to 2 alcohol units for men and 1 unit for women on any drinking day. *(Note: The drinking limits provided here are upper limits, not recommended amounts.)*
- No binge drinking at any time, i.e. consumption of 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row.
- Never drink when you:



are pregnant or planning to become pregnant or about to breastfeed;

are children and adolescents;



are about to do anything that is risky, requires skills or concentration (e.g. driving, operating machinery, or engaging in sports);

are taking medication that interact with alcohol;



have medical conditions made worse by alcohol;

have previous history of alcohol or drug dependence.



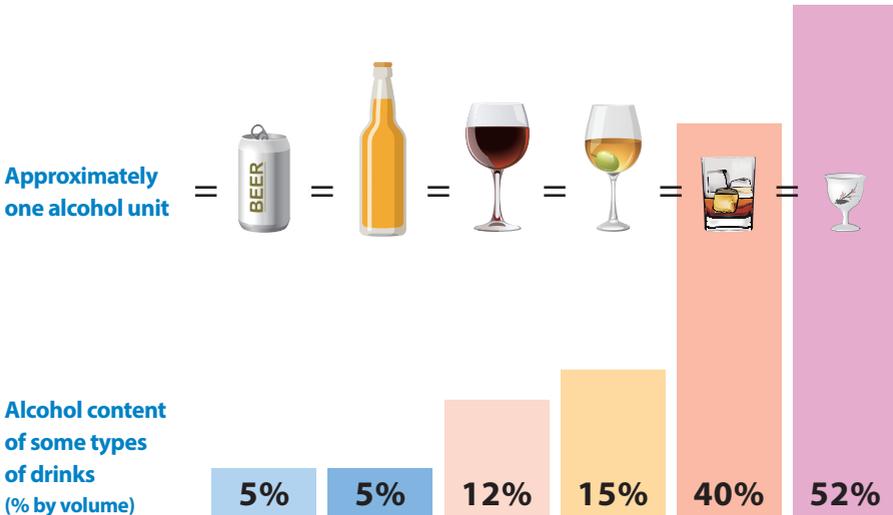
Talk to your doctor if you have any doubts.

V

Understanding about “alcohol unit”

Note that what affects you is not the type of alcoholic beverage, but the amount of pure alcohol contained in your drink. Knowing what an alcohol unit is and what it looks like in various forms and formulations of alcoholic beverages will surely help you when you track your drinking. An alcohol unit, which is a common measure of alcohol content, is equal to 10 grams of alcohol. The images below show the amount served and alcohol content (% by volume or alcohol by volume, ABV) of common alcoholic beverages that is approximately equivalent to **ONE “alcohol unit”**.

| | Beer / Alcopops | Cider | Red Wine / White Wine / Champagne | Plum Wine | Spirits (e.g. Whisky / Vodka / Brandy) | Chinese Spirits / Baijiu |
|--|-------------------------|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Volume per container or per usual serving | 1 can (330ml) | 1 small bottle (275ml) | 1 glass (125ml) | 1 small glass (75ml) | pub measure (30ml) | 0.5 tael (25ml) |



The number of “alcohol unit” of different brands and types of alcoholic beverages can vary a lot. The table below provides the approximate number of “alcohol unit” in some more common types of alcoholic beverages by container volume or usual serving for reference.

| Type of drinks | Alcohol content (% by volume)* | Volume per container or per usual serving | Number of "alcohol unit" per container * |
|---|--------------------------------|---|--|
| Shandy | 0.5% | 330ml (can) | 0.1 |
| Beer / Alcopops | 5% | 330ml (small can) | 1 |
| | | 500ml (king can) | 2 |
| | | 330ml (small bottle) | 1 |
| | | 640ml (large bottle) | 3 |
| Cider | 5% | 275ml (small bottle) | 1 |
| Red wine / White wine | 12% (11% - 15%) | 125ml (small glass) | 1 (1 - 2) |
| | | 750ml (bottle) | 7 (7 - 9) |
| Champagne / Sparkling | 12% | 125ml (small glass) | 1 |
| | | 750ml (bottle) | 7 |
| Fortified Wine (Sherry / Port) | 15% - 20% | 125ml (small glass) | 2 |
| Spirits (Whisky / Vodka / Gin / Rum / Tequila / Brandy) | 40% (35% - 57%) | 30ml (pub measure) | 1 |
| Plum wine | 15% | 300ml (small bottle) | 4 |
| Sake | 16% | 300ml (small bottle) | 4 |
| Hua Diao Jiu | 18% | approx. 50ml (1 tael) | 1 |
| | | 250ml (water glass) | 4 |
| Glutinous Rice Wine | 18% | approx. 50ml (1 tael) | 1 |
| | | 250ml (water glass) | 4 |
| Shuang Zheng Jiu | 30% | approx. 50ml (1 tael) | 1 |
| | | 250ml (water glass) | 6 |
| San Zheng Jiu | 38% | approx. 50ml (1 tael) | 2 |
| | | 250ml (water glass) | 8 |
| Chinese spirits (Baijiu) | 52% (38% - 67%) | approx. 50ml (1 tael) | 2 (2 - 3) |
| | | 250ml (water glass) | 10 (8 - 13) |

Remark: *These values are approximate only.

The number of alcohol units of different types of alcoholic beverages can also be calculated using the following formula.

$$\begin{array}{c} 1 \\ \text{Alcohol} \\ \text{Unit} \end{array} = \mathbf{10\text{g}} \\ \text{Alcohol}$$

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{Number} \\ \text{of Units} \\ \text{of Alcohol} \end{array} = \begin{array}{c} \text{Drink} \\ \text{Volume} \\ \text{(ml)} \end{array} \times \frac{\text{Alcohol Content} \\ \text{(\% by volume)*}}{\mathbf{1000}} \times \mathbf{0.789}$$

*Alcohol content is printed on the label of the container.

Reference:

Change for Health website. Hong Kong SAR: Department of Health.

https://www.change4health.gov.hk/en/alcohol_aware/facts/standard_drink/index.html



VI

Are you drinking at risky levels?

Many people don't always know how much alcohol they drink and its potential impact on their health. The following **Alcohol and Health Questionnaire** (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test, AUDIT), a quick self-assessment tool, can help you assess the level of drinking and the risk to your health.

Assess level of drinking

| In the past year... | Scoring system | | | | | Your score |
|---|----------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 1. How often do you have a drink containing alcohol? | Never | Monthly or less | 2 - 4 times per month | 2 - 3 times per week | 4+ times per week | |
| 2. How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking? (Please add up all types of alcoholic drinks) | 0 - 2 | 3 - 4 | 5 - 6 | 7 - 9 | 10+ | |
| 3. How often do you have at least 5 cans of beer / 5 glasses of table wine / 5 peg of spirits on one occasion? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |
| 4. How often during the last year have you found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |
| 5. How often during the last year have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of your drinking? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |
| 6. How often during the last year have you needed an alcoholic drink in the morning to get yourself going after a heavy drinking session? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |

AUDIT-C

| In the past year... | Scoring system | | | | | Your score |
|--|----------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------|---------------------------|------------|
| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 7. How often during the last year have you had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |
| 8. How often during the last year have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking? | Never | Less than monthly | Monthly | Weekly | Daily or almost daily | |
| 9. Have you or somebody else been injured as a result of your drinking? | No | | Yes, but not in the last year | | Yes, during the last year | |
| 10. Has a relative or friend, doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested that you cut down? | No | | Yes, but not in the last year | | Yes, during the last year | |

TOTAL SCORE _____

Alcohol unit conversion *(relatively proportional to scale)*

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 0.7 unit | 1.3 units | 1.3 units | 2.0 units | 2.5 units | 1.2 units | 1.3 units | 0.7 unit | 5.7 units | 0.6 unit | 0.8 unit | 0.3 unit |
| 1 glass (180ml) Beer / alcopops | 1 can (330ml) Beer / alcopops | 1 bottle (330ml) Beer / alcopops | 1 can (500ml) Beer / alcopops | 1 bottle (640ml) Beer / alcopops | 1 glass (125ml) Red / White wine / Champagne | 1 peg (40-50ml) Spirits | 1 shot (22ml) Spirits | 1 glass (180ml) Rice wine | 1 small glass (20ml) Rice wine | 1 maotai glass (20ml) Maotai | 1 small cup (20ml) Japanese Sake |

For online version, please visit:
<https://change4health.gov.hk/en/audit> or scan the QR code.



Reference:

Babor TF, Higgins-Biddle JC, Saunders JB and Monteiro MG. AUDIT The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test: Guidelines for Use in Primary Care. Second Edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2001.

How to Interpret your Final Score?

Score
16–19

Your drinking level belongs to **“Harmful drinking”**.
This means:

- Your drinking is causing significant damage to your physical and mental health. [Scan QR code below to download “Drink or NOT DRINK? Be Informed if you drink” Booklet](#) to know more about alcohol harms.
- It is best to cut down your drinking. This booklet gives you practical steps and tips to help you start making a change.
- If you find it hard and can’t cut down on your own, **seek help** from medical professionals or community resources to help you quit. [Please refer to Section XI of this self-help booklet.](#)

Score
1–7

Your drinking level belongs to **“Lower-risk drinking”**. However, you should:

- Try to drink less or abstain for preventing cancer and other diseases. [Scan QR code below to download “Drink or NOT DRINK? Be Informed if you drink” Booklet](#) to know more about alcohol harms.
- If you drink, limit to 2 alcohol units for men and 1 for women on any drinking day, and minimise the frequency of your drinking by having more alcohol-free days. [Please refer to Section V of this self-help booklet](#) to find out how many alcohol units your drinks contain.
- In some situations, even small amounts of alcohol per day would present risks to you or others. Never drink, if you have medical conditions, are taking medications, operating a vehicle or machinery, are pregnant, or are underage.

Score
0

Keep it up! Staying alcohol free is the first step to a healthy life.



Reference:

Babor TF, Higgins-Biddle JC. Brief intervention for hazardous and harmful drinking: a manual for use in primary care. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2001.

Score
20–40

Your drinking level belongs to **“Probable dependence”**.
This means:

- Your drinking is already causing you many problems and you could be alcohol dependent.
- **You should definitely quit your drinking step by step under the help of professionals.** However, to avoid withdrawal symptoms from alcohol (such as tremors, sweating, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, anxiety, insomnia, mental confusion), **you should NOT suddenly stop drinking completely on your own.**
 - You should **ask your doctor** for referral to specialist for more evaluation and treatment. You can also **seek help** from some community resources. **Please refer to Section XI of this self-help booklet.**

Score
8–15

Your drinking level belongs to **“Increasing risk”**.
This means:

- You are at increased risk of harming your health as a result of drinking. **Scan QR code below to download “Drink or NOT DRINK? Be Informed if you drink” Booklet** to know more about alcohol harms.
 - To prevent future health problems, you should cut down or stop drinking. This self-help booklet gives you practical steps and tips to help you start making a change.
 - If you have any concern about your drinking and health, please talk to your doctor.

Of note, a **score of 1 or more on AUDIT Q3** indicates you at risk of **“Binge drinking”**

- You tend to binge drink (i.e. consumption of 5 or more alcoholic drinks in a row), even occasionally, is dangerous and harmful, as it increases the immediate risk of alcohol poisoning and accidental injury.
- Try hard to limit your drinking – no more than 2 alcohol units for men and 1 for women on any drinking day, and minimise the frequency of your drinking by having more alcohol-free days. **Please refer to Section V of this self-help booklet** to find out how many alcohol units your drinks contain.

“DRINK or NOT DRINK?”
Be Informed if you Drink!”
booklet





If your responses to the questionnaire indicate that you fall into the **'Increasing Risk (scores 8–15)'** or **'Harmful Drinking (scores 16–19)'** category, this means your level of drinking presents risks to your health and possibly other aspects of your life.

Many people find it possible to quit their drinking step by step if they decide to do so and work hard at changing their drinking habits. The following sections may be of help to you.



Warning

If you are **dependent on alcohol or suspected of suffering from this condition (scores 20–40)**, you should immediately seek help and advice from relevant professionals and doctors on how to reduce your drinking in a safer way, and you should **NOT** suddenly stop drinking completely.

Suddenly stopping drinking for people who are dependent on alcohol can be very dangerous and even fatal. If you experience any withdrawal symptoms (such as tremors, seizure, sweating, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, anxiety, insomnia, mental confusion), **you should consult your doctor at once.**



VII

Are you ready to make a change?

You now understand your drinking risk. It's time to make your decision on whether to continue with your drinking or to cut down or stop drinking. The following question will help you to make up your mind.

What will be the advantages if I cut down or stop drinking completely? (Choose 2-3 most important advantages in the list below)

| If I cut down or stop drinking completely | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will have better health and probably live longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be less likely to get injury from accidents. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will sleep better. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will achieve more in my life. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will be happier. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be better at my job. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will save a lot of money. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will probably find it easier to control my body weight, since alcoholic beverages contain many calories. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My relationships with others will be improved. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be less likely to have a bad mood. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I will stay younger for longer. | <input type="checkbox"/> I will be less likely to offend against the law after drinking. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others: | |

Now you should have a clearer sense of exactly what you expect to happen if you plan to cut down or stop drinking. Please think carefully and "✓" your choice.

- Yes, I am willing to change:
- I want to cut down gradually.
 - I want to stop drinking completely.
- I am not yet ready to change but will consider it later.

Note

Please pay attention to those situations that need 'total abstinence' in [Section IV](#) of this booklet.

VIII

How to get started and stay motivated?

Congratulations 🎉🎉🎉 if you have decided to cut down or stop drinking!

We understand that changing habits is not an easy task. The following steps will help you to get started and stay motivated while cutting down on alcohol.

Step 1

Taking stock

Get started by taking stock of your current drinking habits can help you set a baseline from which to measure your future success.

Q1. Which of the following styles best describe your drinking?

- Frequent – Drinking at least one day in a week.
 Occasional – Drinking no more than three days in a month.

Q2. Thinking back, how much do you usually drink and spend on alcohol each week or month? You can use the following table to figure out your average consumption and spending on alcohol.

| (A) On average, how many days do you drink alcohol each week or month? | (B) On a typical drinking day, what types and how many drinks do you usually have? | (C) From (A) and (B), calculate your average consumption each week or month. | (D) On average, how much do you spend on alcohol each week or month? |
|--|--|--|--|
| If frequent drinkers, Each week: _____ days | On a drinking day, Beer 1.3 units [1 can (330ml)] x _____ drinks  | If frequent drinkers, Each week: _____ drinks/alcohol units* | If frequent drinkers, Each week: \$ _____ |
| If occasional drinkers, Each month: _____ days | Wine 1.2 units [1 glass (125ml)] x _____ drinks  Spirits 1.3 units [1 peg (40-50ml)] x _____ drinks  Others x _____ drinks ===== Total: _____ drinks/alcohol units* | If occasional drinkers, Each month: _____ drinks/alcohol units* | If occasional drinkers, Each month: \$ _____ |

*Note

Please refer to [Section V of this booklet on pages 8-9](#) for the number of “alcohol unit” of more types of alcoholic beverages.

Step 2

Setting specific goals

Deciding to cut back on drinking might sound like a goal, but to ensure success, that goals need to be specific. It is also essential that the goals you set are realistic for you, meaning they are not too ambitious for now, and you feel confident that you can do it. Of course, in the long term, the ideal goal is to stop drinking completely.

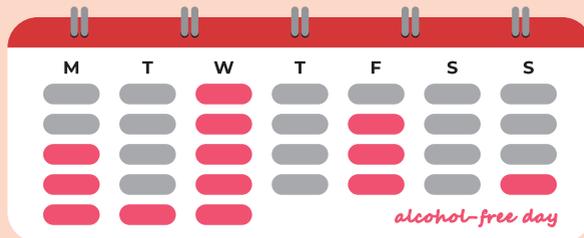
Below are examples of specific and realistic goal setting:



Cut down the drinking quantity gradually from 5 drinks a day to 3 drinks a day, then from 3 drinks a day to fewer than 2 drinks a day within a certain period of time.



Cut down the drinking frequency by choosing 1 or 2 days in a week as alcohol-free day, then extend the duration.



Use the above examples to guide you to set your own goals, go to [page 21 of this booklet](#) and write down how much you want to cut back by, in the table under **“Step 6: Creating your habit-breaking plan”**.

Step 3

Understanding the situations that you drink

Knowing your high-risk situations for drinking is important for you to tackle them more effectively. Please choose the high-risk situations that initiate your drinking episodes from the following table. You can also add your additional situations that are not listed.

| For enjoyments: | As a habit: |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> In parties | <input type="checkbox"/> After work |
| <input type="checkbox"/> During festivals | <input type="checkbox"/> After receiving pay |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With family members | <input type="checkbox"/> Going to bars |
| <input type="checkbox"/> With my friends | <input type="checkbox"/> With some particular people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I got to know new friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Whenever I saw alcoholic beverages stored at home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When watching sports matches | <input type="checkbox"/> When I am smoking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other situations: | <input type="checkbox"/> When I saw alcohol portrayals in media |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Other situations: |
| | |
| When encountering problems or internal triggers: | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I felt tensed | <input type="checkbox"/> When I felt generally low or depressed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I felt lonely | <input type="checkbox"/> When I was sad |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I felt bored | <input type="checkbox"/> When I felt stressed or tired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I could not fall asleep | <input type="checkbox"/> When I had feelings of failure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I was criticised by my family, friends or boss | <input type="checkbox"/> After an argument with my family, partner or friends |
| <input type="checkbox"/> When I got excited | <input type="checkbox"/> Other situations: |
| | |

After you have chosen the high-risk situations that trigger your drinking, go to [page 21 of this booklet](#) and write them down in the table under **“Step 6: Creating your habit-breaking plan”**. The next step is to work out ways of dealing with these situations.

Step 4

Finding your best coping strategies

The followings are some coping strategies people use to deal with an urge to drink. Select the strategies that might work for you. You can also add any of your own strategies at the end of the list.

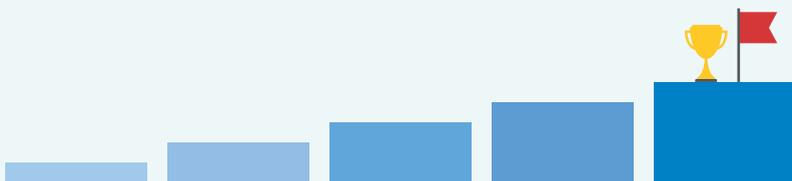
| Coping Strategies: | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limit the number of days drinking with friends after work/school | <input type="checkbox"/> Go home direct after work/school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule non-drinking days every week | <input type="checkbox"/> Not to store any alcoholic beverages at home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limit the amount of money spending on alcoholic beverages each month | <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a saving habit for the money used to be spent on alcohol |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Limit the number of drinks per episode | <input type="checkbox"/> Think about and practise the refusal skills when being invited to drink in different occasions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Switch to non-alcoholic beverages when attending family gatherings and parties | <input type="checkbox"/> Try non-alcoholic beverages when watching sports matches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find another activity when feeling bored, e.g. developing an interest that I like | <input type="checkbox"/> Establish a healthy lifestyle with a regular sleeping pattern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find another activity when feeling tensed, e.g. doing exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> Find another activity when feeling lonely or being criticised at work, e.g. talking to friends who do not drink |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make new friends who do not drink or smoke | <input type="checkbox"/> Tell my family and friends I am cutting down drinking. Ask them to support and remind me |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seek help from health professionals concerning my mood or other mental health problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: |

Now that you have identified the most suitable coping strategies that you could use when facing with your high-risk situations, go to [page 21 of this booklet](#) and write them down in the table under “**Step 6: Creating your habit-breaking plan**”.

Reward yourself when achieving small goals

Getting rewarded for achieving small goals is a useful way to remind yourself your progress along the plan and can motivate you to achieve even bigger goals. Treating yourself with some fresh fruit or engaging in outdoor activities that you like are among the many ideas you may try. You may now plan ahead for making these incentives available to yourself upon reaching a small goal. Include the list on [page 22 of this booklet](#) by writing it down in the table under “**Step 6: Creating your habit-breaking plan**”.

Step 5



References of Section VII and VIII:

- Babor TF, Higgins-Biddle JC. Brief intervention for hazardous and harmful drinking : a manual for use in primary care. Appendix B - Self-Help Booklet. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2001. p. 39-46.
- World Health Organization. Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use (ASSIST): a guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010.
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Education. Saying When: How to quit drinking or cut down [Mobile app]. Canada: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health; 2014. Available from: <https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/saying-when-how-to-quit-drinking-or-cut-down/id881678936>
- Next Step Drug and Alcohol Services and Workforce Development Branch, Mental Health Commission. Self help guide. Australia: Mental Health Commission of Western Australia; 2016.
- McKee SA, Weinberger AH. How can we use our knowledge of alcohol-tobacco interactions to reduce alcohol use? *Annu Rev Clin Psychol.* 2013;9:649-74.
- Koordeman R, Anschutz DJ, Engels RC. Self-control and the effects of movie alcohol portrayals on immediate alcohol consumption in male college students. *Front Psychiatry.* 2015 Feb 3;5:187.
- TWGHs "Stay Sober Stay Free" Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Treatment Service. Self-help guide [Internet]. Hong Kong SAR: Tung Wah Group of Hospitals; 2016. Available from: <http://atp.tungwahcsd.org/index.php/Engli/project.html>
- 香港特別行政區：醫院管理局青山醫院屯門酗酒診療所。《踢酒攻略》小冊子，2018年版。

Step 6

Creating your habit-breaking plan

People who successfully change their habits usually follow a simple plan. You can use the following table to help you work out a plan to reduce drinking which is acceptable and realistic to you.



Goal

[] I will cut down:

[] my drinking frequency:

Maximum number of days a week / month I will drink:
_____ drinking days per week / month[#]

[] my drinking quantity:

Maximum number of drinks or alcohol units* I will have
on a single day: _____ drinks or
alcohol units* per day

[] I will stop drinking completely.

[#] Delete as appropriate.



Start date



Advantages
for me to
change my
drinking
habit

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

(Please refer to *Section VII of this booklet* and write down 2-3 reasons that are most important to you.)

*Note

Please refer to *Section V of this booklet on pages 8-9* to understand about "alcohol unit".



Dealing with my reasons in the past to drink

High-risk situations

Best coping strategies

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |

*(Please refer to **Step 3 and Step 4 on pages 18-19** and write down your high-risk situations and best coping strategies.)*



Important people who can support me

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Include those who truly care about your well being and health in your plan. Remember to share your plan with each of these people. They can help you succeed so they should be part of it.)



Rewards for success

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Step 7

Keeping a drinking diary for tracking progress

After setting your goal and habit-breaking plan, now you should record the drinking occasion and amount of alcohol you have drunk every day to help you track progress and measure your success.

Date: From _____ to _____

Goals of this week:

Goal 1) Maximum _____ drinking days per week / month[#]

Goal 2) Maximum _____ drinks or alcohol units* per day

[#] Delete as appropriate.

| Day | Time | Occasion | Alcohol types and no. of drinks | Alcohol units* consumed | Money spent on drinking | Meet Goal 2 of daily drinking limit? |
|-----|------|----------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Mon | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |
| Tue | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |
| Wed | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |

| Day | Time | Occasion | Alcohol types and no. of drinks | Alcohol units* consumed | Money spent on drinking | Meet Goal 2 of daily drinking limit? |
|-----|------|----------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Thu | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |
| Fri | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |
| Sat | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |
| Sun | | | | | \$ | Yes / No |
| | | | | | \$ | |

Summary of this week:

Total number of drinking days: _____ (Meet Goal 1? Yes / No)

Total number of days meeting Goal 2 of daily drinking limit: _____

Total expenditure: \$ _____

***Note**

Please refer to [Section V of this booklet on pages 8-9](#) for the number of “alcohol unit” in different types of alcoholic beverages.

IX

Self-control tips



Plan ahead to stay in control.



Know your drinks and choose wisely:

- Just like food, know the alcohol content (alcohol by volume, ABV) of the beverages that enters your mouth.
- Choose drinks with no alcohol, or drinks with lower alcohol content if you choose to drink.



Change to make yourself less wanting and less easy to drink alcohol, for examples:

- Avoid going to bars and places where people drink alcohol.
- Don't store any alcoholic beverages at home.
- Enjoy other activities, rather than drinking alcohol, during your leisure time.
- Try regular exercise or learn relaxation techniques to relieve your stress instead of drinking alcohol.
- Feel the difference of your body when you are making progress to drink less and less.



On Special Occasions (e.g. banquets and festive gatherings):

- Ask for non-alcoholic beverages if you choose NOT to drink, because you can still have a great time with non-alcoholic beverages as alternatives.
- If you choose to drink, make it clear that you wish to limit your drinking. Avoid refills.



Learn new ways to make friends and to maintain a social life without drinking alcohol.



Consult health professionals and doctors whenever you have doubts.

X

How to handle relapsing?

Returning to alcohol use after you have stopped for a while is common. It is normal to feel disappointed, but the trick is to be prepared for it and not letting the emotions overtake you. Common triggers for relapse include:

- Pressure from others to drink alcohol.
- When you are experiencing emotions such as frustration, anger, fear, anxiety, tension, depression, loneliness, sadness, boredom, jealousy, worry, grief or loss.
- When you are coping with financial or interpersonal problems.
- When you get cravings.



It is important to identify the situations that could trigger relapse for you. This will help you to stop it from happening. You can refer to [Step 4 of Section VIII of this booklet on page 19](#) to help you identify some suitable coping strategies to deal with your triggers.



Here are also some techniques that you can try to cope with cravings:

- **Delay** - Delay your drinking for 30 minutes.
- **Distract** - Get busy! Distract yourself with another activity.
- **Remind** - Remind yourself of the consequences of drinking alcohol and your reasons for making a change.
- **Positive self-talk** - Acknowledge how far you have gone, affirm your strength “I can do it”, remind yourself about someone who is supportive in your quitting, and remind yourself how cravings are destructive feelings that will pass with time.
- **Relaxation practice** - Regular practice of diaphragmatic breathing, listening to music, bringing positive and relaxing images to mind, etc.

References:

- World Health Organization. Self-help strategies for cutting down or stopping substance use (ASSIST): a guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010.
- Next Step Drug and Alcohol Services and Workforce Development Branch, Mental Health Commission. Self help guide. Australia: Mental Health Commission of Western Australia; 2016.

Below are some medical professionals or community resources for stopping drinking.

Hospital Authority's Psychiatry Specialist Out-patient Clinics (SOPCs)

Doctor may refer drinkers with mental health needs to Hospital Authority's Psychiatry SOPCs for assessment and treatment as appropriate. These SOPCs only accept medical practitioners' referrals.

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals Integrated Centre on Addiction Prevention and Treatment (ICAPT)

ICAPT provides one stop integrated treatment services for multi-addiction problems that include alcohol, drug, gambling addiction, internet addiction, sex addiction, overspending, etc. Services include counselling and psychotherapy, health consultation, psychiatric assessment and treatment, treatment group and residential programs.

☎ Telephone: 2827 1000

🌐 Website: <http://icapt.tungwahcsd.org>

✉ Email: icpt-online@tungwah.org.hk

Tung Wah Group of Hospitals "Stay Sober Stay Free" Alcohol Abuse Prevention and Treatment Service

This service includes comprehensive assessment, treatment and counselling for alcohol-related problems, and referral to in-patient treatment.

☎ Enquiry Hotline: 2884 9876

🌐 Website: <http://atp.tungwahcsd.org>

✉ Email: cc-atp@tungwah.org.hk

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

Alcoholics Anonymous is a voluntary organisation comprised of volunteers with groups throughout Hong Kong and worldwide. It provides support to persons wishing to achieve sobriety.

☎🗨 Telephone & Whatsapp: 9073 6922 (English) / 6110 6405 (Chinese)

🌐 Website: <https://aa-hk.org>

Note

The list and details of services may change without prior notification. Please check with the service providers for latest service arrangement. The information is for the convenience of the people in need. It is not to be regarded as an endorsement or guarantee of these organisations and their services.

**Staying clean and sober
may take some effort,
but every small step you take
will surely lead to better health
and a more fruitful life.**

**Use the tips in this
booklet and ask for
help if you need it.**