

Safeguarding Theme of the Month: December – Drink and Drug Awareness

Christmas Binge Drinking: The Facts You Should Know



Christmas is fast approaching, as too is party season for many places of work.

With festive markets and mulled wine stalls springing up in towns and cities up and down the country, the amount of alcohol we consume as a nation at this time of year will inevitably increase.

The month of December is undoubtedly a time for socialising, relaxing and enjoying ourselves after a hard year's work.

But it's important to keep in mind that the effects of alcohol on the body are the same as they are during any other month; and that binge drinking in particular can pose an increased risk to heart health.

The risks of drinking too much

- Regularly drinking more than 14 units a week risks damaging your health.
- Fourteen units is equivalent to six pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine.
- New evidence around the health harms from regular drinking have emerged in recent years.
- There is now a better understanding of the link between drinking and some illnesses, including a range of cancers.
- The previously held position that some level of alcohol was good for the heart has been revised.
- It is now thought that the evidence on a protective effect from moderate drinking is less strong than previously thought.

Low-risk drinking advice

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level if you drink most weeks:

- men and women are advised not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis
- spread your drinking over three or more days if you regularly drink as much as 14 units a week
- if you want to cut down, try to have several drink-free days each week

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If you're pregnant or think you could become pregnant, the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all to keep risks to your baby to a minimum.

No 'safe' drinking level

- If you drink less than 14 units a week, this is considered low-risk drinking.
- It's called "low risk" rather than "safe" because there is no safe drinking level.
- The type of illnesses you can develop after 10 to 20 years of regularly drinking more than 14 units a week include:
 - cancers of the mouth, throat and breast
 - stroke
 - heart disease
 - liver disease
 - brain damage
 - damage to the nervous system

The effects of alcohol on your health will depend on how much you drink. The less you drink, the lower the health risks.

'Single session' drinking

Drinking too much too quickly on any single occasion can increase your risk of:

- accidents resulting in injury, causing death in some cases
- misjudging risky situations
- losing self-control, like having unprotected sex

To reduce your health risks on any single session:

- limit how much you drink
- drink more slowly
- drink with food
- alternate with water or non-alcoholic drinks

Sensible Drinking

Here's what can you do to limit the damaging effects that alcohol has on your body, yet not give up completely:

- Stay within the new guidelines
- Have a majority of alcohol-free days
- Help your body clear out the alcohol by drinking plenty of water between alcoholic drinks. It's estimated that your body needs four-parts water to every one-part alcohol to remove it from your system.

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- Keep an eye on your urine. Alcohol is a diuretic; in other words it encourages your body to flush away water. If your urine is dark amber or strong smelling your body is dehydrated and if you drink alcohol this can stress your liver.
- Drink slowly. This gives your body – and more importantly your liver – time to metabolise and flush the toxins from your body.
- Never drink on an empty stomach as this floods your body with alcohol and forces your liver to work too hard. Make sure that you eat carbohydrates and fats before drinking alcohol to line the stomach, prevent nausea, hangovers and to avoid getting drunk. Food will also absorb some of the alcohol, thereby slowing its delivery into your blood stream. This allows your body to process the toxins slowly and safely.

If you would like to speak to our safeguarding team about any of the related issues; or if you have any safeguarding concerns, please contact a member of the team.

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Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year

But above all, stay safe