

# **Sensible Drinking**



## **A Personal Guide to Help Reduce The Negative Consequences of Drinking**

**DEVELOPED USING MATERIALS FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION:  
DEPT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCE**

## What is Sensible Drinking?

*Sensible Drinking* is a booklet for people who would like to make sure their drinking is unlikely to cause harm to themselves or others. It provides information about the amount of alcohol in a drink, and what happens to the body when you drink too much. Most important, it provides you with information to help evaluate your drinking practices and the tools to make better decisions about when, where, and how much to drink.

## Who Can Benefit from Sensible Drinking?

Anyone who is curious or concerned about their drinking practices can benefit from these self-educational materials. If you've asked yourself any of the following questions, then reading through this booklet will help you find the answer:

- How do I know if I'm drinking too much?
- What is a normal amount of drinking?
- Would things go better in my life if I drank less?
- Am I getting harmed by alcohol or am I at greater risk?
- How do I cut down or completely stop drinking?

*Sensible Drinking* is for people who may already be taking steps to make healthier choices in their lives. Many people who are curious or concerned about their drinking are also trying to improve their health through such things as exercising more, stopping smoking, eating more nutritionally, and learning how to more effectively handle stress in their lives.

## Who is not likely to benefit from this booklet?

People who are seriously dependent on alcohol, or alcoholics, need to receive professional substance abuse treatment rather than educational and self-help approaches such as *Sensible Drinking*. *Sensible Drinking* is for people who may have mild to moderate problems with alcohol who want to make healthy choices about their drinking.

## What is a normal standard drink?

These drinks, in normal measures, each contain roughly the same amount of pure alcohol. Think of each one as a standard drink.

### What's a Standard Drink?

1 standard drink =



1 can of ordinary beer  
(e.g. 330 ml at 5%)

or



A single shot of spirits (whiskey, gin, vodka, etc.)  
(e.g. 40 ml at 40%)

or



A glass of wine or a small glass of sherry  
(e.g. 140 ml at 12% or 90 ml at 18%)

or



A small glass of liqueur or aperitif  
(e.g. 70 ml at 25%)

## How do I know if I'm drinking too much?

The most important thing to be aware of is the amount of pure alcohol in a drink. The answer to this question is specific to every individual. For example, some people may be highly sensitive to alcohol and learn that it's best for them to limit themselves to ½ of a standard drink. Other people may decide that because of reasons such as health problems or disrupted sleep that drinking any alcoholic beverage is “too much.” In this case, sensible drinking would mean not drinking at all.

Overall, most people find that learning what is meant by “low-risk drinking” and “high-risk drinking” makes it easier for them to answer the question of whether or not they're drinking too much.

## What is low-risk drinking?

Low-risk drinking means limiting alcohol use to amounts and times of use that are unlikely to cause harm to yourself or others. The risk of harm increases significantly when people consume more than two drinks per day and more than five days per week. Even smaller amounts of alcohol present risks in certain circumstances.

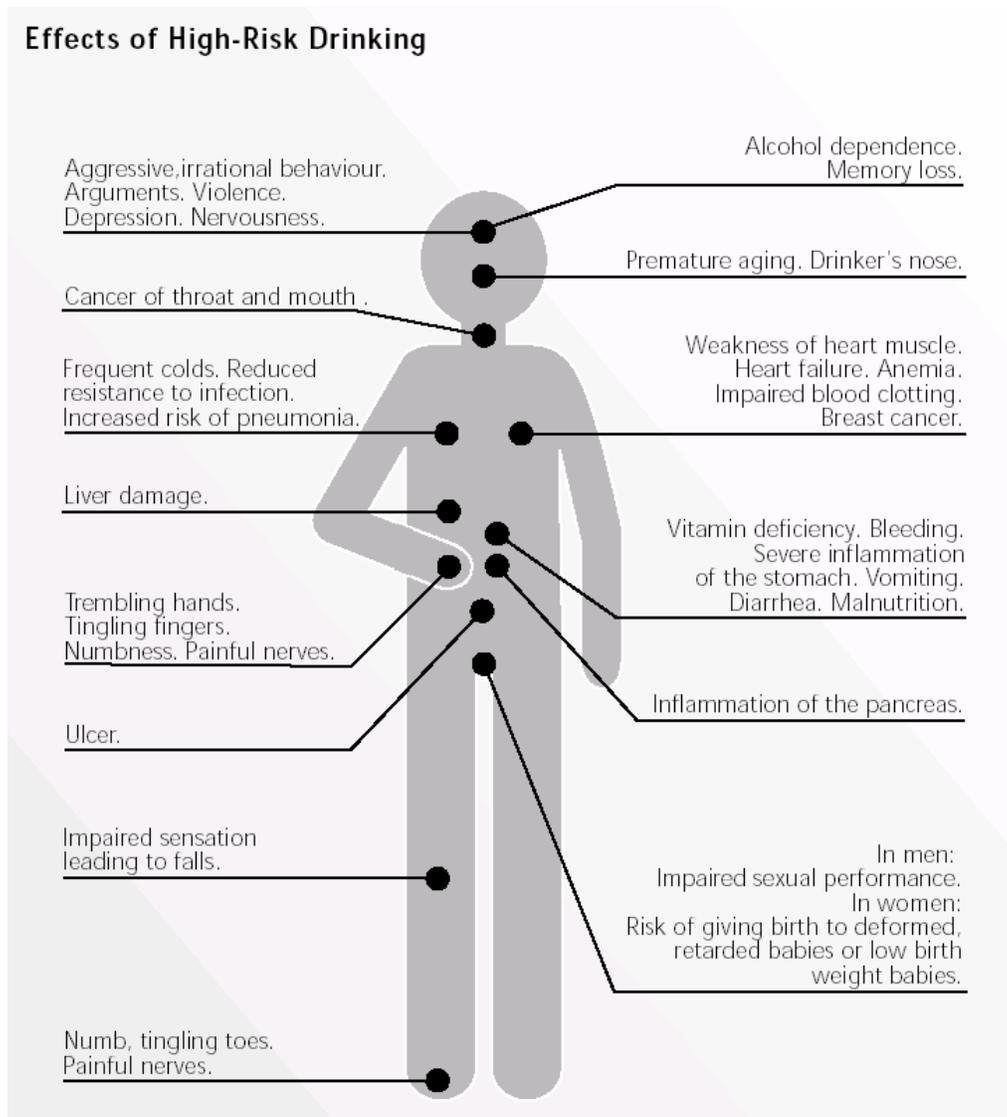
If you have been drinking above these limits, you risk causing harm to yourself and others. Having three or more drinks on one occasion creates risks of “accidents” involving injuries, problems in relationships and at work, and medical problems such as hangovers, sleeplessness, and stomach problems. Drinking more than two drinks per day over extended periods may cause cancer, liver disease, depression, and dependence on alcohol (alcoholism). Fortunately, most people can stop or reduce their drinking if they decide to do so and work hard at changing their drinking habits.

In general, sensible, low-risk drinkers follow these rules:

- Have no more than two drinks of alcohol per day
- Drink no more than five days per week
- Do not use any alcohol at times when you:
  - ▶ Drive or operate machinery
  - ▶ Are pregnant or breast feeding
  - ▶ Are taking medications that react with alcohol
  - ▶ Have medical conditions made worse by alcohol
  - ▶ Cannot stop or control your drinking

## What is high-risk drinking?

Re-read the rules at the end of *What is meant by low-risk drinking?* High-risk drinking means that you are breaking one or more of these rules. High risk drinking can also lead to social, legal, medical, domestic, job and financial problems. If you are experiencing any of these problems related to your drinking, then you are at high-risk. High-risk drinking can also cut your life short and lead to accidents and death from driving while intoxicated.



## Why should I decide to drink less?

Here is a list of benefits that you can reasonably expect if you cut down on your drinking. Read through them and choose three that seem to be the best reasons to you. **Check the box for the ones that make you want to cut down.** When you have chosen **three good reasons** for cutting down on your drinking, **make a note of them in the spaces provided at the end of this booklet under “*Creating Your Habit-Breaking Plan.*”**

### **If I drink within low-risk limits:**

- I will sleep better.
- I will be happier.
- I will save a lot of money.
- My relationships will improve.
- I will stay younger for longer.
- I will achieve more in my life.
- There will be a greater chance that I will survive to a healthy old age without premature damage to my brain.
- I will be better at my job.
- I will probably find it easier to stay slim, since alcoholic beverages contain many calories.
- I will be less likely to feel depressed and to commit suicide (6 times less likely).
- I will be less likely to die of heart disease or cancer.
- The possibility that I will die in a fire or by drowning will be greatly reduced.
- Other people will respect me.
- I will be less likely to get into trouble with the police.
- The possibility that I will die of liver disease will be dramatically reduced (12 times less likely).
- It will be less likely that I will die in a car accident (3 times less likely).
- FOR MEN: My sexual performance will probably improve.
- FOR WOMEN: There will be less chance that I will have an unplanned pregnancy.
- FOR WOMEN: There will be less chance that I will damage my unborn child.

Now you should have a clearer picture in your mind of exactly what you expect to happen if you continue to drink heavily and a clearer picture of your future if you stop drinking or drink within low-risk levels.

## High-Risk Situations

Your desire to drink heavily probably changes according to your moods, the people you are with, and whether or not alcohol is easily available. Think about the last time you drank too much and try to work out what things contributed to your drinking. What situations will make you want to drink heavily in the future?

Use the following list to help you identify **four situations** in which you are most likely to drink too much. Check at least **four dangerous situations or moods** that give you the most trouble. **Write these down in the pages provided at the end of this booklet under “*Creating Your Habit-Breaking Plan.*”**

- Parties
- Particular people
- Festivals
- Tension
- Family
- Feeling lonely
- Bars
- Dinner parties
- Mood
- Boredom
- After Work
- Sleeplessness
- Arguments
- Weekends
- Criticism
- After receiving pay
- Feelings of failure
- When others are drinking

The next task is to work out ways of dealing with these situations without drinking more than the recommended limits.

## What to Do When You are Tempted

In this section try to answer the question:

***How can I make sure that I'm not tempted to drink too much and, if I am tempted, what can I do to stop myself?***

1. Choose one of your four high-risk situations.
2. Think of different ways of avoiding or coping with it.
3. **Select two of these ways to try out.**
4. Write them down in "***Creating Your Habit-Breaking Plan***" at the end of this report.

## Ways of Coping When Drinking Less

- Go home rather than drinking
- Find another activity, e.g., exercise
- Limit the number of days drinking after work with friends
- Have only two drinks when drinking
- Switch to non-alcoholic beverages after two drinks
- Change friends
- Work later

Notice that some of the ideas probably would not work. This doesn't matter when trying to produce ideas. Just think of as many as you can and then decide which ones are the most likely to work for you. **When you have selected two ways of coping with your first high risk situation, move on to the next one so that you end up with two ways of coping with each of the four high-risk situations.**

The next area of your life that you should think about is the relationship that you have with other people. If you can increase the number of times each week that you enjoy the company of other people (without drinking above sensible limits), then you will not need to use alcohol as much.

## Sensible Drinkers Make Sensible Friends

The first point to remember is that most of us need other people. We need to socialize. Secondly, one of the best ways of encouraging yourself to drink at low risk levels is by having friends who drink within low-risk limits. Thirdly, you will increase your chances of making new social contacts if you put yourself in situations where you will meet new people. Therefore, the next task that you should set for yourself is to think of ways of putting yourself in such situations. **Again, use the method of thinking of as many ideas as you can and then choose two that are most likely to work for you and write them down on your "Creating Your Habit-Breaking Plan."**

### Ideas:

- Join a club
- Help with religious activities or the Community Center
- Help out at my son or daughter's school or Youth Club
- Join a voluntary organization (e.g., helping the handicapped)
- Invite people home more often
- Visit relatives more often

## Special Tips for Those Who Drink When Bored

Many people drink because they are bored. If boredom contributes to your drinking beyond low-risk limits, your task in this section is to think of as many activities as you can that might hold your interest and then **select two of them to try**. Use the following questions to help produce this list. **Write down the two ways of meeting other low-risk drinkers that you choose on your “*Creating Your Habit-Breaking Plan.*”**

- What types of things have you enjoyed learning in the past? (e.g., sports, crafts, languages)
- What types of trips have you enjoyed in the past? (e.g., to the ocean, to the mountains, to the country)
- What types of things do you think you could enjoy if you had no worries about failing? (e.g., painting, dancing)
- What have you enjoyed doing alone? (e.g., long walks, playing a musical instrument, sewing)
- What have you enjoyed doing with others? (e.g., talking on the telephone, playing a game)
- What have you enjoyed doing that costs no money? (e.g., playing with your children, going to the library, reading)
- What have you enjoyed doing that costs very little (e.g., going to a park)
- What activities have you enjoyed at different times? (e.g., in the morning, on your day off work, in the spring, in autumn)

## It Takes a Plan to Drink Sensibly

Follow your habit-breaking plan for the next few weeks. You must go over your plan each day. If you don't, you will just forget about it, especially when you are faced with a high-risk or tempting situation. These tips will help you keep your plan in mind:

- ❖ Think of an activity that you do several times every day (e.g., drinking a cup of coffee, washing your hands).
- ❖ Whenever you carry out that activity (e.g., drinking coffee), very quickly go over the plan in your mind. Think about your drinking plan, reasons for cutting down, dangerous situations and ways of coping with them. Also think of your plans for meeting other people and beginning interesting activities.
- ❖ If you have a helper, talk about your plan and progress every day at first and then several times a week as you have success sticking to it.
- ❖ If your plan is clearly in your mind, then it will help you to change. If it is only on paper it will have no effect at all.
- ❖ Remember that every time you are tempted to drink too much and are able to resist, you are breaking your habit.
- ❖ Whenever you feel very uncomfortable, distressed or miserable, keep telling yourself that it will pass. If you crave a drink, pretend that the craving is like a sore throat that you have to put up with until it goes away.
- ❖ If you have a helper, tell that person honestly how much you had to drink each day and when you have been successful or have drunk too much.
- ❖ Finally, it is likely that you will have some bad days on which you drink too much. When that happens, **DON'T GIVE IN**. Remember that people who **HAVE** learned to drink at low-risk levels had many bad days before they were finally successful. **It will get easier in time.**

# Create Your Habit-Breaking Plan

## Reasons for cutting down or stopping drinking:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

High-risk Situation 1: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

- 1.
- 2.

High-risk Situation 2: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

- 1.
- 2.

High-risk Situation 3: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

- 1.
- 2.

High-risk Situation 4: \_\_\_\_\_

## Ways of coping:

- 1.
- 2.

## Ways of meeting others who don't drink or do so within low-risk limits

- 1.
- 2.

## Ways of avoiding boredom to try

- 1.
- 2.

## How to remember your plan

- 1.
- 2.