

Safer drinking During Covid-19 Pandemic

Canolfan Gymraeg am Weithredu ar Ddibyniaeth

WCADA

Welsh Centre for Action on Dependency and Addiction

Inspiring Change  Achieving Potential



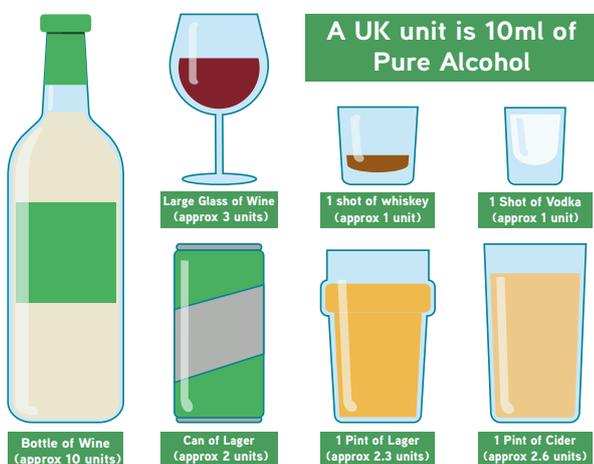
The Covid-19 pandemic has affected everyone, some more than others and is continuing to cause many people a level of anxiety. Some individuals are experiencing financial concerns. Others may have health concerns for themselves, their family and friends. Some parents are facing concerns about home schooling, amongst many other things.

Maybe you no longer need to get up early in the morning, and are experiencing high levels of boredom, frustration, anxiety, loneliness, isolation or stress. During these times it can be very easy to increase your normal levels of alcohol consumption to help you feel as if you're relieving some of these negative feelings. However, it is important to remember that the relief of these feelings using alcohol is only temporary, and the feelings can return stronger or more pronounced.

Alcohol: effects and risks

Alcohol is a depressant drug which means it depresses the central nervous system and can make us feel more relaxed. Initially it also affects the 'reward system' in our brain allowing us to feel better. However, repeated exposure to alcohol 'dampens' our reward system and can cause us to drink more, which can make us vulnerable to physical and psychological addiction.

Alcohol addiction or dependence is incredibly life affecting and can cause a whole host of medical issues such as increased risk of cancers, significant mental health problems, behavioural problems and premature death. Withdrawal from alcohol is also potentially life threatening and often requires treatment from specialist medical teams.



Binge Drinking

There is also an increasing amount of evidence from specialists highlighting the dangers of 'binge drinking'. Binge drinking is defined as drinking a large quantity of alcohol in a short space of time and the government guidelines show that this may be much less alcohol than you may think.

Binge drinking is considered to be drinking more than 4-6 units of alcohol in one sitting. This is as little as two pints of premium cider or more than two large glasses of wine. When drinking at home, you pour your own measures. Sometimes 'home measures' are much bigger than pub measures meaning you end up drinking more. Even though you may think a 'quick slip of the hand' is harmless, you could actually be more than doubling the amount of alcohol that you are consuming.

If you feel your levels of alcohol consumption have increased of late, you can ask yourself some *questions which may help you make a decision to take action and reduce the risks of your drinking getting out of hand:

1. Do you find you often drink more alcohol than you originally planned?
2. Have you had feelings of guilt or remorse after a drinking session?
3. Has anyone else in your life mentioned your drinking or suggested you try and reduce?

If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, you could be at an increased risk of developing alcohol related problems.

(*Disclaimer: This is not a diagnostic tool for alcohol dependence. If you are concerned about your alcohol use, please seek further guidance.)

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Tips on how to cut down

If you would like to cut down for this reason or because you would like to feel a bit healthier, here are some hints and tips to help you:

- 1. Keep a drink diary:** This is probably the best way of keeping track of your drinking. There are plenty of free Apps you can download which will also give you an accurate unit calculation to give you an exact idea of what you are drinking. Once you are aware of the amount of units you are drinking, it can give you some ideas as to how to 'shave away' some units and cut down your alcohol intake without even noticing.
- 2. Get into a routine:** Plan your days so that you can stay occupied. Evidence shows us that people drink less when they are busy. Engage in your favourite hobbies, chat to friends, keep active, do a free online course. Whatever it takes to take your mind off turning to alcohol.
- 3. Keep refreshed in the sun:** We have been experiencing some lovely weather of late which can be a big trigger. However, if you keep hydrated with other enjoyable drinks, you are less likely to fancy an alcoholic drink. Try some interesting flavoured cordials or mix soft drinks with juices to create things you may never have tried before.
- 4. Remember the calories:** Not only are alcoholic drinks notoriously high in calories but drinking sessions can affect our sleep and we often feel tired the following day. Feeling tired can cause us to make poor food choices and we are more likely to eat quickly made, calorie filled foods rather than preparing healthy meals.
- 5. Have at least 2 days alcohol free a week (unless you start to experience feelings of withdrawal):** Each time your liver filters out alcohol some of the liver cells die. Even though the liver of a healthy person is resilient and can generate new cells, repeated alcohol use stops the liver being able to reproduce healthy cells and your liver can be compromised. Your liver has more than 500 jobs to do in the body so keeping your liver healthy can go a long way to keeping you healthy.
- 6. Reward yourself:** Make sure you feel rewarded in other ways for achieving your goals. Treat yourself to a new pair of shoes, a DVD or a computer game with the money you may have saved from cutting down your alcohol intake.

Support available from WCADA

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had to reduce face-to-face contact with members of the public. However, we are still facilitating Needle Exchange and providing telephone support and are now operating at our original opening times:

Monday - Friday: 9am - 5pm

You can contact our agencies on the below numbers:

Swansea WCADA: 01792 472519

Neath WCADA: 01639 633630

Port Talbot WCADA: 01639 890863

Bridgend WCADA: 01656 667717

If you require support outside of these hours, please contact



**Wales Drug and Alcohol Helpline
DAN 24/7
Telephone 0808 808 2234 Or
Text DAN to 81066**

Dan 24/7 is a free and confidential drugs helpline. Calls from public telephone boxes are free of charge: calls from a mobile phone may incur a charge from your network.

Dan 24/7 telephone number will NOT appear on your home itemised bill

Support from other Organisations

 **020 7766 9900**

drinkaware  **contact@drinkaware.co.uk**

 **www.drinkaware.co.uk**

The Drinkaware website provides a variety of resources to help improve peoples knowledge around alcohol. They also offer a free alcohol tracking App. which is handy for keeping any eye on how much you are drinking.



 **020 3907 8480**

 **contact@alcoholchange.org.uk**

 **alcoholchange.org.uk**

Alcohol Change UK is a leading UK alcohol charity, formed from the merger of Alcohol Concern and Alcohol Research UK. Their website hosts a wealth of information around alcohol: Its harms, how to get help, and how to change your drinking behaviour to minimise alcohol harm.