

STANDARD DRINKS AND LOW-RISK DRINKING

This fact sheet provides an overview of the Australian Alcohol Guidelines for young people and tips on how to minimise the risks...

Did you know?

The 2009 Australian Alcohol Guidelines provided by the National Health and Medical Research Council of Australia, recommend the use of standard drinks and low-risk drinking to help minimise the risk of harm.

Key facts

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol (12.5 ml of pure alcohol). Different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of pure alcohol. These are all equal to approximately one standard drink:

- > Low-alcohol (light) beer (2.7%): 1 1/4 of a 375ml can
- > Mid-strength beer (3.5%): 1 stubby, total volume 375ml
- > Regular beer (4.9%): 1 pot, 285ml
- > Regular beer (4.9%): 2/3 of a 375ml stubby
- > White or red wine (12%): 1 small glass, 100ml
- > Pre-mixed spirits, ready-to-drink (RTDs), mixed drinks (5.5%): 2/3 of a 340ml bottle
- > Mixed drinks: 1 glass, 30ml of spirits (40%) plus mixer
- > Spirits or liqueurs (40%): 1 nip, 30ml

Things to remember

- > A drink served in some hotels may contain more than one standard drink. Large wine glasses can hold two standard drinks or more.
- > A drink served at home may contain more than one standard drink.
- > Cocktails can contain as many as five or six standard drinks, depending on the recipe.

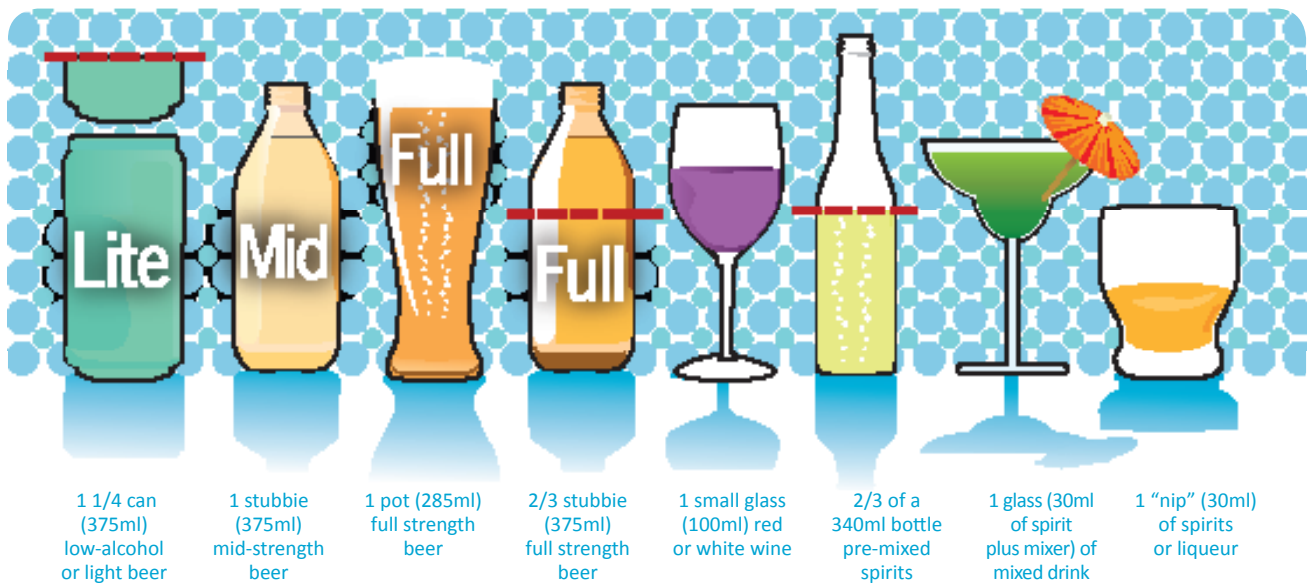
What's on the label?

The labels on bottles, cans and casks of alcohol carry important information about the alcohol content of the product you have purchased. This information includes how much actual alcohol (ethyl alcohol) is in the container, and is expressed as:

- > a proportion of the total fluid (e.g. regular strength beer contains 4.8% to 5.0% alcohol)
- > the number of standard drinks (e.g. a can of regular beer contains approximately 1–1.5 standard drinks).

The label may also list other ingredients in the product, such as preservatives, sugar or milk. The label on some pre-mixed drinks also indicates the type of alcohol (wine, vodka, bourbon etc.).

Standard drinks: each one of these drinks equals approximately one standard drink.



Australian Alcohol Guidelines

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines describe low-risk drinking as a level of drinking at which there is likely to be little risk of harm occurring to the person.

Is there a safe level of drinking for under-18s?

- › **Low-risk drinking does not mean 'safe drinking'.** In fact, there is no guaranteed safe level of drinking.
- › Note that the guidelines that follow are general guidelines designed for young people under 18 years of age. Young people who are on medication (see [Fact sheet 5: Medicines and alcohol: a dangerous mix](#)), using illicit drugs, have a health condition (physical and/or mental), driving or operating machinery, playing sport or participating in/supervising risky activities (such as diving or rock climbing) are advised to avoid alcohol.

Guidelines for under-15s

Research suggests that children and adolescents younger than 15 years of age should be advised to not drink alcohol at all as it is the safest option. The risk of death or injury is just too great. [Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development](#) explains some of the long-term harms associated with teenage drinking.

Guidelines for 15–18 year-olds

According to the most recent research, young people aged 15–18 years are advised that not drinking is the safest option for them.

Furthermore, the research suggests that people aged 15–18 years should not drink as it is not possible to set a safe or no-risk level for young people.

Health risks for young people

- › **Immediate and short-term risks**—depending on how much a person drinks, he or she could suffer reduced concentration, slower reflexes, reduced coordination, poor muscle control, intense moods, confusion, blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, coma or even death.
- › **Binge drinking**—is drinking heavily over a short period of time, drinking continuously over a number of days or weeks, or drinking to get drunk. Binge drinking is harmful because it results in immediate and severe intoxication. As well as the health risks, it can lead to young people taking unnecessary risks and putting themselves and others in danger of injury, violence, or accidental death. Common effects of binge-

drinking episodes are hangovers, headaches, shakiness, nausea, vomiting, 'blacking out' and passing out.

- › **Long-term health risks**—excessive patterns of drinking over time can cause cancer (especially of the mouth, throat and oesophagus), cirrhosis of the liver, brain damage and memory loss, and sexual dysfunction, including male impotency.

Additional risks for young people

- › Increased risk of dependence (addiction) and brain damage. The changes that occur to the brain during adolescence make young people more vulnerable to the addictive actions of drugs, including alcohol. Until age 21 in women and age 28 in men, the brain is particularly vulnerable to the damage that can be caused by alcohol. (See [Fact sheet 1: Alcohol and adolescent development](#).)
- › Alcohol lowers inhibitions. A teenager who drinks excessively or gets drunk can find him/herself doing things he/she may not normally even consider. The young person may be at risk of unplanned or unwanted sex and/or unwanted pregnancy. He/she may suffer social embarrassment or exclusion through, for example, fighting or vomiting in public.
- › Alcohol can affect the condition of skin and hair, and thus can affect the young person's appearance.
- › The calorie content of alcoholic drinks can lead to weight gain.
- › Heavy drinking over time can lead to problems with family, friends, relationships, finances, school/work and the law.

Special considerations and tips

- › If they choose to drink, it's helpful for young people to know how they can stay in control of what and how much they drink. You can help by explaining what a standard drink is and the guidelines for low-risk drinking (see chart on page one).
- › Remember that the effects of alcohol vary from person to person, depending on how much or how quickly they drink, whether they are taking other drugs (including medication) at the same time and so on. But how alcohol affects the teenager also depends on whether he or she is used to drinking, his/her mood, age, weight, sex and general health.

Further information/Where to get help

- › For further information about the effects of alcohol, standard drinks and low-risk drinking, see www.druginfo.adf.org.au.
- › For telephone counselling, call DirectLine on tel **1800 888 236**.
- › For tips on communicating with your teenager about alcohol, see [Fact sheet 6: Which parental factors influence young people's choices about alcohol?](#) and [Fact sheet 7: Teenage drinking: Parents' communication style can make a difference](#).
- › Department of Health, Better Health Channel has a list of health services in your area, see http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcsite.nsf/pages/service_directory?opendocument