

## ► Alcohol

Alcohol is a socially acceptable drug.  
It is a part of many people's social lives.

Alcohol is made when yeast is added to a sugary solution such as grape juice. The yeast breaks down the sugar to make alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. This is called fermentation.

Alcohol is a **depressant** – it slows down your body's reactions.  
As with many other drugs it can be **abused**.  
Alcohol does not often kill – a person usually loses consciousness before they can take a fatal amount.

Some people become **dependent** upon alcohol. Their bodies develop a **tolerance** and they need to take greater amounts to get the same effect. People that become **addicted** to alcohol can not face life without a drink. They are called **alcoholics**.

Alcohol is absorbed through the gut and carried to the brain in the blood.  
From there it affects the nervous system. Many people find a little alcohol relaxing. Increasing amounts make them dizzy. Their judgement and reactions become affected. For this reason a person should not drink and drive.

With greater amounts of alcohol people lose control of their muscles and their speech becomes slurred. A person in this state is more likely to get into a fight or have an accident. Their coordination becomes so poor that they can not walk and end up passing out.

Look at the diagram :  
How many units of alcohol are there in :  
– a double whisky  
– a pint of beer ?

Different brands of alcoholic drinks have different strengths of alcohol.  
Why are spirits served in smaller glasses than beer ?

Some lagers are much stronger than others. The strength of alcohol is shown on the label as percentage volume of alcohol.



All these drinks contain 1 unit of alcohol

## ► Long-term effects of alcohol

Drinking large amounts of alcohol over a number of years can have serious effects on health. It can lead to stomach ulcers, heart disease and brain damage.

The liver is the part of the body that breaks down alcohol.

Alcohol abuse over a number of years can lead to **cirrhosis** of the liver.

The liver tissue becomes scarred and its healthy cells become replaced with fat, or fibrous tissue.

The liver becomes less able to carry out its job of removing the toxins from the blood.

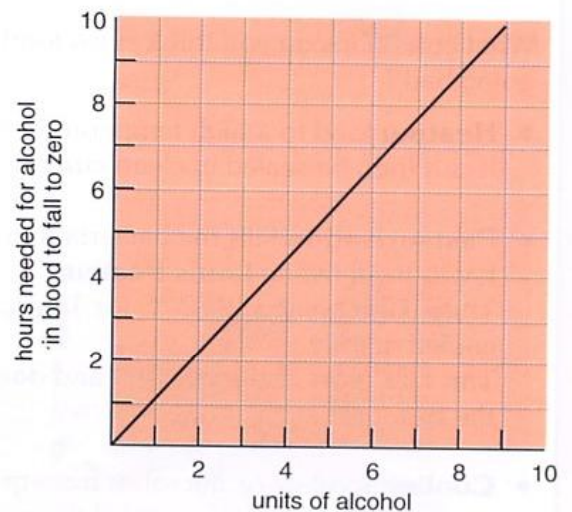
Even a healthy liver takes time to break down alcohol and make it harmless.

It takes about **one hour** to remove **one unit** of alcohol from the blood.

So depending upon the strength and quantity of the drink, it may take several hours before the body is free from alcohol.

Different drinks contain different amounts of alcohol. Also a 'safe' amount of alcohol will depend upon age, sex, body size and metabolic rate.

The safe amount for a woman is about two-thirds of that for a man of the same weight.



Like many other drugs alcohol is habit-forming. A social drinker can turn into a problem drinker.

Many people who become dependent on alcohol do not think that they are.

They try to convince themselves that they do not have a problem.

They feel tense and irritable and find it hard to cope with everyday problems without a drink.

Alcoholics can cause their families pain and misery. They can become aggressive after drinking and spend a lot of money on drink.

Organisations like Alcoholics Anonymous can help alcoholics.

