

Factsheet: Alcohol and liver disease

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Drinking alcohol regularly increases your risk of developing liver disease and can cause irreparable damage to this important organ.



Severe liver failure is fatal and although it can be treated by transplantation, there is a shortage of organs and transplantation is ineffective if you continue to drink heavily.

Alcohol-related liver disease is caused by drinking alcohol, usually over several years.

One in five adults in the UK drink alcohol in a way that could harm their liver.

Regularly drinking more than the UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMOs) low risk drinking guidelines **can harm your liver.**

If you choose to drink, to keep health risks from alcohol low, it is safest for both men and women to drink **no more than 14 units a week**, spread over three or more days with several drink-free days, and no bingeing. If you're not sure what 14 units looks like – that's six pints of average strength beer or six medium (175ml) glasses of average strength wine.



6 pints of beer (568ml/4%)



6 glasses of wine (175ml/13%)

Who does alcohol-related liver disease affect?

Although around **seven in 10 people** with alcohol-related liver disease have an alcohol dependence problem, it is not only daily drinkers who develop liver disease. **Heavy drinking on a few days every week is also associated with alcohol-related liver disease.**

By understanding the impact drinking alcohol can have on your liver and substantially reducing the amount you drink each week, some alcohol-related liver disease may be reversed, or not get any worse.



The more you drink above these low-risk guidelines, **the higher your risk of developing alcohol-related liver disease.**

How does alcohol affect the liver?

Any time we drink alcohol, the liver must break it down before it is removed from the body. However, some liver cells die during this process. Having a break from alcohol is important to allow the liver to recover and make new cells. Sustained heavy drinking doesn't allow the liver time to do this. This is why the liver sustains the most tissue damage through regular heavy drinking, which leads to alcohol-related liver disease.

Identifying alcohol-related liver disease

The early stages of alcohol-related liver disease can be difficult to identify as there are not usually any symptoms.

Often this means alcohol-related liver disease is diagnosed during tests for other conditions, or at a stage of advanced liver damage.

Symptoms may include:

- Abdominal (tummy) pain
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting



Reducing the amount you drink, ideally to zero, can help reverse damage, and reduce the risk of disease progression, for those with early-stage alcohol-related liver disease.

If you already have established alcohol-related liver disease, it is essential that you stop drinking completely and permanently, to help prevent progression to even more serious disease. You will probably need professional help to stop drinking.

Please speak to your GP or a health professional for advice.



When you're ready to drink less, Drinkaware is ready for you. For more information, advice and tools to help you reduce your drinking, search Drinkaware.

Change starts with you.