Alcohol: standard drinks and low-risk limits

Facts about standard drinks and low-risk limits in Ireland.

Many people drink more than they realise, because measures poured at home are bigger than pub measures and because it is easy to lose count.

What is a standard drink?

In Ireland a standard drink has about 10 grams of pure alcohol. That is roughly:

Beer or lager
A half pint of normal-strength beer

Wine
A small glass (100ml). A bottle has about seven.

Spirits
A pub measure (35.5ml)

The HSE low-risk guidelines

- No more than 11 standard drinks a week for women, and 17 for men
- Spread over the week, with two to three alcohol-free days
- No more than 6 standard drinks on any one occasion

The HSE says that no level of drinking is completely safe for health, and that the less you drink, the lower the risk. These guidelines were under review in 2026, so check hse.ie for the current figures.

Signs that drinking is becoming a problem

- [ ] Drinking more, or more often, than I mean to
- [ ] Needing more to get the same effect
- [ ] Drinking to cope with stress, sleep or feelings
- [ ] Feeling guilty or secretive about it
- [ ] Other people commenting on it
- [ ] Gaps in memory after drinking
- [ ] Arguments, missed work or risks taken because of it
- [ ] Finding it hard to imagine a week without it

Alcohol and mood

Alcohol lifts mood for an hour or two, then lowers it. It worsens anxiety the next day, disrupts sleep and makes low mood harder to shift.

Important
If you drink heavily every day, do not stop suddenly. Withdrawal can be dangerous. Talk to your GP first about cutting down safely. The HSE Drugs and Alcohol Helpline can also advise: freephone 1800 459 459, Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.30pm.

What I notice about my own drinking

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Drink diary

Record every drink for one week.

Name _____ Date _____

Record every drink, as close to the time as you can. One standard drink is a half pint of beer, a small glass of wine (100ml) or a pub measure of spirits.

Day	What I drank	Standard drinks	Where and who with	What was going on (mood, reason)
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Total for the week	Alcohol-free days	Most in one day

What do I notice? When and why do I drink most?

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