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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