

Reducing your alcohol safely

Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team



Outstanding
Care for One+All

Important information about alcohol withdrawal

During your hospital visit, we identified that you may be at risk of alcohol withdrawal when you go home. You may feel surprised or disappointed to be advised not to stop drinking alcohol straight away. However, stopping alcohol suddenly can be dangerous if your body is used to drinking regularly. It can cause withdrawal symptoms that can be serious and, in some cases, life-threatening.

This advice is to help keep you safe while you get support to reduce or stop drinking alcohol safely.

REMEMBER – you are not alone

Getting help is a positive step towards better health. The With You team are here to guide and support you through every stage of your recovery.

With You (Cornwall)

➔ Telephone: 0333 200 0325

What is alcohol withdrawal?

Alcohol withdrawal is a medical condition that can occur when someone who drinks alcohol heavily suddenly stops or cuts down. Over time, your body becomes used to alcohol. Stopping it suddenly can disrupt your brain's chemical balance and cause withdrawal symptoms.

Symptoms of alcohol withdrawal

Symptoms may include:

- shaking or tremors
- sweating
- anxiety or restlessness
- nausea (feeling sick)
- vomiting
- headaches
- confusion
- seizures (fits)

One unit is equal to:



Half pint of
regular beer,
lager or cider



1 small glass
of wine
(125ml)



1 single
measure of
spirits



1 small glass
of sherry



1 single
measure of
aperitifs

The following contain more than one unit:



Pint of
regular
beer,
lager or
cider



Pint of
premium
beer/lager
/cider



1.5
Alcopop or
can/bottle
of regular
lager



2
Can of
premium
lager or
strong beer



4
Can of
super
strength
lager



2
Standard
glass of
wine
(175ml)



9
Bottle
of wine

What if I get withdrawal symptoms?

If you develop withdrawal symptoms, do not stop drinking suddenly. Try to reduce your drinking slowly instead.

You may find it helpful to think of alcohol like a medicine. The 'dose' needs to be measured and spaced out to help manage symptoms and prevent untreated withdrawal.

It is also important to:

- eat regular, nutritious meals
- Choose foods rich in vitamins and minerals such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein.
- drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration and aid your body's recovery.

Important

If you have previously had seizures or hallucinations when reducing alcohol, or if your symptoms become severe, seek medical advice immediately.

Why reduce my drinking?

Cutting down on alcohol can improve your health in many ways.

Positive effects include:

- **better physical health** – reduced risk of liver disease, stroke, heart disease, high blood pressure, and some cancers
- **improved mental health** – less anxiety, depression, and mood swings
- **better sleep** – improved sleep quality and feeling more rested
- **more energy** – greater ability to manage daily activities
- improved digestion and nutrition: better absorption of nutrients
- improved weight management – alcohol is high in calories
- safer behaviours – lower risk of accidents and injuries
- financial benefits – spending less on alcohol

Keep a drinks diary

Writing down what you drink and when can help you reduce your alcohol intake by making you more aware of your drinking pattern.

You may want to record:

- type of drink (such as beer, wine, spirits, cider)
- amount (units or glasses)
- time of day
- where you were or what you were doing
- how you were feeling (stressed, happy, bored, socialising)
- any triggers that made you want to drink

This can help you identify situations or triggers that lead to drinking and set realistic goals for cutting down.

How do I reduce my drinking safely?

Reducing alcohol slowly is safer than stopping suddenly and lowers your risk of withdrawal symptoms.

Your reduction plan

1. Plan and stabilise

- Spread your drinks throughout the day, especially around midday.
- Plan your drinking and aim for the same amount each day.
- Keep to this amount for one week.

2. Start cutting down

- After one week, reduce your daily intake by about 10%
- Keep to this lower amount for four days
- Continue this reduction if you feel well

3. Watch for withdrawal symptoms

- Look out for shaking, sweating, anxiety, nausea, or poor sleep.
- These may mean you are cutting down too quickly.

4. If symptoms start

- Increase your alcohol intake slightly until symptoms settle
- Keep this amount steady for one week
- Then start reducing again more slowly.

5. Continue reducing

- Aim to reduce your intake by around 10% each week
- Go at a pace that feels manageable.

Important

Cutting down slowly is much safer than stopping suddenly.
Seek medical advice if symptoms are severe or you are concerned

Tips to help you cut down

- Ask a trusted adult to support you if possible. They can help measure drinks, monitor your intake, and keep alcohol safely stored, which can make cutting down easier.
- Choose lower-strength drinks where you can. For example, replace a high-strength lager with a standard-strength lager.
- Measure your drinks so you know how much you are having.
- Add water or a mixer to alcoholic drinks, or alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks or water.
- Eat little and often, even if you do not feel hungry. Although this may feel challenging, it plays an important role in your recovery.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Electrolyte powders or tablets may help if you are dehydrated and may reduce feelings of “foggy-headedness”. These are available over the counter.
- Consider getting support from community alcohol services such as With You (Cornwall) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

What should I look out for?

Seek urgent medical advice if you:

- have a seizure or fit
- become confused or disorientated
- see or hear things that are not there (hallucinations)
- develop double vision
- become very unsteady on your feet or unable to walk safely

If you live with someone, please share this leaflet with them so they know when to get help for you.

Driving and medication safety

Caution

If you were given benzodiazepines (such as chlordiazepoxide/ Librium, diazepam / Valium, or lorazepam) before leaving hospital, **do not drive or operate machinery for at least 72 hours** and until you feel completely well again.

Never drink and drive

Alcohol and some medicines can affect judgement, reaction time, and concentration. Driving under the influence is unsafe and illegal.

Contact the Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team

If you would like to discuss the advice you have been given, please contact:

The Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team

- ➔ Telephone: 07557215449
8am to 4pm Monday to Sunday

Note: This is not an emergency service

Further support and information

With You (Cornwall)

- ➔ Website: www.wearewithyou.org.uk
- ➔ Telephone: 0333 200 0325

YZUP (Under 18s)

- ➔ Website: www.wearewithyou.org.uk
- ➔ Telephone: 0333 200 0325

Alcoholics Anonymous

- ➔ Website: www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/intergroups/cornwall-intergroup
- ➔ Telephone: 0800 917 7650

Alcohol Change UK

- ➔ Website: www.alcoholchange.org.uk

NHS guidance

- ➔ Website: www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less

Drinkaware

- ➔ Website: www.drinkaware.co.uk/tools

Al-Anon (support for family and friends)

- ➔ Website: www.al-anonuk.org.uk
- ➔ Telephone: 0800 0086 811

With You – affected others (support for family and friends)

- ➔ Website: www.wearewithyou.org.uk
- ➔ Telephone: 0333 200 0325

NHS – non-urgent medical advice

- ➔ Website: www.111.nhs.uk
- ➔ Telephone: 111

Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust – mental health self help guides

➔ Website: www.selfhelp.cntw.nhs.uk/organisation/cornwall-partnership-nhs-foundation-trust

References

www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention/chapter-12-alcohol

www.gov.uk/guidance/clinical-guidelines-for-alcohol-treatment

www.safercornwall.co.uk/alcohol-units-whats-safe

www.nhs.uk/better-health/drink-less

For an online version of this leaflet please scan this QR code



To get this information in a different format call 01872 252690

© Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS
Trust Patient Information 2026

Reference RCHT2219
Printed 09/2026
Version 1.0
Review due 09/2029

Outstanding
Care for One+All