

Alcohol and CF – The Facts

INTRODUCTION

Your liver works to rid your body of alcohol. This is a slow process. Alcohol is removed at about 1 unit per hour, so if you drink heavily in the evening the alcohol will still be in your system the next morning! If you drink 5 standard pints of lager it will take 10 hours to get your blood alcohol level to return to zero.



HANGOVERS

These are caused by dehydration. Alcohol encourages the body to lose more water than it takes in. It also affects vitamin and mineral balance resulting in thirst, muscle cramps, dizziness and faintness.

BINGE DRINKING

This is classed as an episode of drinking more than 6 units of alcohol in less than six hours. This amount of alcohol puts enormous strain on the liver and puts us more at risk of hangovers and abnormal behaviour.



ILL EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a depressant. It can slow down the way your brain and body works. It affects the way you think and what you do. It can make you argumentative or violent, sick and dizzy. You may do things which you regret!

Longer term effects

- Loss of brain cells
- Liver failure
- Stomach ulcers
- High blood pressure
- Certain types of cancer
- Nerve damage
- Heart failure
- Epilepsy
- Vitamin deficiencies
- Infertility
- Problems with sleeping
- Anxiety and mood swings



Information for Patients

Drinking alcohol can be a very enjoyable and sociable part of life. However, drinking too much regularly or drinking a large amount in one session can be harmful to your body.

WHAT IS A SENSIBLE LIMIT?

The health education authority recommends 3-4 units per day for men and 2-3 units per day for women. Women who are trying to become pregnant or are pregnant should avoid alcohol completely. If you have liver problems it is advisable that you do not have any more than 2 units of alcohol 2-3 times per week.



WHAT IS A UNIT?

A UK unit is 10ml or 8 grams of pure alcohol. The number of units in a drink depends on what you are drinking – how strong it is and how much there is. You may have seen examples of drinks that contain one unit, but these examples are often out of date or based on lower alcohol drinks/smaller measures. Below are the average units of alcohol contained in drinks people tend to consume nowadays.

- 1 pint of ordinary strength lager (Carling Black Label/Fosters) = 2 units
- 1 pint strong lager (Stella/Kronenbourg 1664) = 3 units
- 1 pint bitter (John Smiths/Boddingtons) = 2 units
- 1 pint ordinary strength cider (Woodpecker) = 2 units
- 1 pint strong cider (Dry Blackthorn/Strongbow/Magners) = 3 units
- 175ml red/white wine (depends on strength of wine) = 2 units
- Pub measure of spirits = 1 unit
- 1 bottle Alcopop (WKD/Bacardi Breezer/Smirnoff Ice) = 1.5 units

HOW DOES THIS ADVICE RELATE TO ME?

The advice to the general public regarding alcohol consumption should also be followed by those with CF. In some ways people with CF are more at risk of ill effects of alcohol. In Cystic Fibrosis the liver can be 'sluggish' which means to rid the body of alcohol the liver has to work harder and this puts more strain on it, putting you more at risk of liver damage than those in the general population. Some medications can enhance the effects of alcohol causing unpleasant symptoms. Also, some medications may not work effectively when taken alongside alcohol. Body size also makes a difference to alcohol tolerance and how this affects us. Smaller, lighter people are more affected by alcohol as the alcohol is more concentrated in a smaller surface area.

Information for Patients

WAYS TO HELP LIMIT YOUR ALCOHOL INTAKE

- ✓ Choose standard/lower alcohol beers/wines, ie; Carling/Carlsberg/Fosters or a 9% ABV wine.
- ✓ Alternate alcohol with soft drinks (diet drinks if you are diabetic).
- ✓ Have single measures rather than double (even if it is 'Happy Hour').
- ✓ Do not mix drinks.
- ✓ Make your drink a longer one by adding more mixer. Spread your alcohol intake over the week rather than drinking heavily one or two nights in the week.
- ✓ Go out later in the evening so that you have less time to drink alcohol.
- ✓ Always eat before having alcohol.
- ✓ Stay out of rounds, drink at your own pace not at the pace of others!
- ✓ Drink plenty of water after having alcohol.
- ✓ Have at least two days off alcohol after a drinking session.

Contact us:

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this information, please contact one of our CF Dieticians:- on 0121 424 1796 (direct line with answer phone) 0121 424 2000 Bleep 2425 or email: joanne.barrett@heartofengland.nhs.uk, toni.osborne@heartofengland.nhs.uk, elizabeth.glennon@heartofengland.nhs.uk, rebecca.jones@heartofengland.nhs.uk

Additional Information Sources:

For more information on all aspects of living with Cystic Fibrosis you can visit the Cystic Fibrosis Trust web site at : www.cftrust.org.uk.

For local news and events the West Midlands Regional Cystic Fibrosis Unit based at Heartland Hospital has its own website at: www.heartlandscf.org.uk .

Please use the space below to write down any questions you may want to ask: