

> What is harmful drinking?

Harmful drinking is defined as a pattern of alcohol consumption causing health problems directly related to alcohol. This includes psychological problems such as depression, alcohol-related accidents or conditions such as acute pancreatitis.

> What are the risks of heavy drinking?

Long term heavy drinking can increase your risk of developing:

- High blood pressure - a major risk factor of having a stroke or heart attack
- Heart disease
- Liver disease
- Liver cancer and bowel cancer
- Mouth cancer
- Cirrhosis of liver (where damage to the liver causes scar tissues to build up which can lead to cancer)

> Other effects of alcohol

- **Alcohol has high sugar content;** drinking excessive amounts over time can decrease the effectiveness of insulin, leading to high blood sugar levels (diabetes)
- **Alcohol is a diuretic-** it acts on the kidneys to make you lose more fluids from your body, leading to dehydration which can cause headaches
- **Alcohol poisoning** - this may lead to vomiting, seizures (fits) and falling unconscious

> What about treatment?

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) has been shown to be helpful
- Medication such as acamprosate, disulfiram, naltrexone and nalmefene can be prescribed to treat alcohol misuse
- Keeping a drinking diary to record how many units of alcohol you drink a week may help control your alcohol intake

Alcohol Units

1 unit is:

½ pint beer, lager, cider ABV 3.6%
125ml glass of wine
25ml measure of spirits
100ml glass of prosecco

Alcohol Guidelines

- Men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units a week
- If you drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week, it's best to spread this evenly over three days or more
- Pregnant women should not drink alcohol
- Have one or two alcohol free days each week
- If you have drunk too much, allow 48 hours for your body to recover

Do you know that?

- Alcohol is very high in calories and excessive consumption can lead to weight gain
- Alcohol can affect your sleep patterns and it best to avoid drinking alcohol before bedtime
- Alcohol weakens the heart muscle, which can mean the heart does not pump blood efficiently, this can cause premature death, usually through heart failure

References: NHS choices: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/high-blood-pressure-hypertension/>
Public Health England: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-combating-high-blood-pressure/health-matters-combating-high-blood-pressure>

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To contact Bromley Well call the Single Point of Access on **0808 278 7898** or Lifestyle Support on **07985 444210 / 07985 433045** Email enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk www.bromleywell.org.uk



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> Further resources

Drinkaware www.drinkaware.co.uk Drinkline 0300 123 1110	National charity providing advice, information and tools to help you make better choices about your drinking.
Alcohol Concern www.alcoholconcern.org.uk Helpline 0800 9177 650	National charity providing information, advice and support to help you make better choices about your drinking.
Drink Wise Age Well	National charity offering information and support to make healthier choices about alcohol as you age.
Drugs and alcohol in Bromley 0208 289 1999 Bromley Drug and Alcohol Services	BDAS, local support. Link to further information about support within the borough.
NHS Live Well Alcohol Support	Information on the risks of drinking too much alcohol and tips on cutting down and drinking sensibly.
NHS Approved Apps	Includes Drinks Tracker App. An easy-to-use drinks tracker to help you stay in control of how much alcohol you drink.