

## Responsible drinking – what does it mean?

Everyone talks about drinking responsibly but it can be hard to know exactly what that means in practice. Learning about ways to keep your alcohol intake in check can be the first step in learning to drink responsibly, but there are a number of ways you can do this through personal responsibility and outside help.

It's common to hear the phrase 'drink responsibly' when people are talking about alcohol. But what does that actually mean in practice?

### What does it mean to drink responsibly?

There are a number of different aspects to what it means to drink responsibly. Being a responsible drinker basically means:

- > *Making sure you're safe*
- > *Making sure other people are safe*
- > *Actively avoiding dangerous situations*
- > *Minimising the risks to yourself and others*
- > *Having a positive drinking experience*

### How can I be a responsible drinker?

Some of the ways you can be a responsible drinker include...

**Keep an eye on what you're drinking.** Find out about what a standard drink is (see ReachOut.com's fact sheet 'What is alcohol?') and use that as a way of keeping track of how much you're drinking. Think about the alcohol content in each drink you consume and make sure that you're spacing out the time between your drinks.

*In practice* – If you're drinking shots, remember that spirits often have a high alcohol content. Make sure you leave enough time between shots to feel the effects of the first one before shooting the next one. Also drink water between your drinks to help dilute the alcohol in your system.

**Don't drink and drive.** This one kind of sells itself. If you have to drive anywhere, don't drink more alcohol than is recommended if you're driving (around 1 standard drink for women, 2 standard drinks for men on a full licence. The laws are different for provisional and learner licenses and different between states so make sure you check the laws in your area). Alcohol is a depressant drug which slows down your reaction speed, which means if you need to think and act fast, you probably won't be able to.

### This might help if you want to know about...

- > *What it means to drink responsibly*
- > *Why drinking responsibly matters*
- > *How to drink responsibly*
- > *How to limit your alcohol intake*

*In practice* – If you're going out for a big night, work out amongst your group of friends who's going to be the one that drives home. If no one wants to have a sober night, bring enough money for a taxi. You could also keep an emergency cash stash at home,, so that if something unexpected happens and you need a taxi, you can still pay the fare.

**Wait till you're 18.** It's actually illegal to drink if you're under 18 and this isn't just because adults want to tell you what to do. The main reason is just that your body doesn't cope as well with alcohol when you're younger. Your brain, heart and liver just aren't fully developed enough to process the alcohol so it can do serious damage to your health.

*In practice* – Even if your underage mates are drinking, go for the soft drink. If you're worried about what they'll think of you, you can even pretend that there's alcohol in your drink. Because really, no one wants the police on the phone to their parents (or a criminal record!).

**Avoid mixing alcohol and other drugs.** The impact of mixing alcohol and other drugs (whether medication or recreational) is pretty serious. Not only can you not anticipate the effect it will have on your behaviour, it will most likely make you pretty sick. There are no safe combo's when it comes to alcohol and other drugs, so it's better to just stick to one or the other.

*In practice* – If you're on medication, check the information in the box to see what it says about drinking alcohol. If you're taking recreational drugs, you're better off just sticking with what you're on and not mixing.

## The basics

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The basic thing to remember around responsible drinking is common sense. If it doesn't sound like a good idea, it probably isn't one. If you're not comfortable with the environment you're in or are worried about bad things happening, you should probably rethink your plans.

If you don't feel able to drink responsibly, for whatever reason, it might mean you need to seek some outside advice. Have a chat to someone you think is responsible about how they keep themselves in check.