

# Help with Alcoholism Fact Sheet

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**Pharmacist Support**

working for pharmacists & their families

## What is alcoholism?

**Alcohol abuse** occurs when a person is not dependent on alcohol, but is drinking enough to cause themselves physical or psychological harm.

**Alcohol addiction** (or dependence) can occur if a person drinks frequently or drinks large amounts of alcohol. You may be dependent on alcohol if you have experienced ONE or more of the following symptoms during a year:-

- A strong urge to drink, difficulty controlling how much you drink, or difficulty stopping drinking
- Physical withdrawal symptoms when reducing drinking: sweating, shaking, agitation and nausea.
- An increased tolerance to alcohol
- A gradual neglect of other activities
- Persistent drinking, even though it is obviously causing harm.

## How much is too much?

Current UK guidelines:

**Men:** 3-4 units a day

**With a maximum of 21 units a week**

**Women:** 2-3 units a day

**With a maximum of 14 units a week**

One drink is not necessarily one unit, for example:-

- One pint of strong lager (alcohol 5% vol) = 3 units
- One pint of standard strength lager (alcohol 3 - 3.5% vol) = 2 units
- One 275ml bottle of an alcopop (alcohol 5.5% vol) = 1.5 units
- One standard (175ml) glass of wine (alcohol 12% vol) = 2 units
- One measure (25ml) of a spirit strength drink = 1 unit

## Signs and symptoms of alcoholism

### The Michigan Alcohol Screening Test (MAST) Questionnaire

1. Do you feel you are a normal drinker?  
**Yes (0) No (2)**
2. Have you ever awakened in the morning after some drinking and found that you could not remember a part of the evening before?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
3. Does your wife (husband), girlfriend (boyfriend), and/or parents ever worry or complain about your drinking?  
**Yes (1) No (0)**
4. Can you stop drinking without a struggle after one or two drinks?  
**Yes (0) No (2)**
5. Do you ever feel guilty about your drinking?  
**Yes (1) No (0)**
6. Do your friends or relatives think you are a normal drinker?  
**Yes (0) No (2)**
7. Do you ever try to limit your drinking to certain times of the day or to certain places?  
**Yes (0) No (2)**
8. Are you always able to stop drinking when you want to?  
**Yes (0) No (2)**
9. Have you ever attended a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) because of your own drinking?  
**Yes (5) No (0)**
10. Have you ever got into fights when drinking?  
**Yes (1) No (1)**
11. Has drinking ever created problems with you and your wife (husband), girl (boy) friend?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
12. Has your wife (husband), girl (boy) friend or other family member ever gone to anyone for help about your drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**

13. Have you ever lost friends because of your drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
14. Have you ever got into trouble at work because of your drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
15. Have you ever lost a job because of drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
16. Have you ever neglected your obligations, your family or your work for two or more days in a row because you were drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
17. Do you drink before noon fairly often?  
**Yes (1) No (0)**
18. Have you ever been told you have liver trouble?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
19. Have you ever had delirium tremens (DTs), severe shaking, heard voices or seen things after heavy drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
20. Have you ever gone to anyone for help about your drinking?  
**Yes (5) No (0)**
21. Have you ever been in hospital because of drinking?  
**Yes (5) No (0)**
22. Have you ever been in a psychiatric hospital/clinic or on a psychiatric ward of a general hospital where drink was a part of the problem (in- or out-patient)?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
23. Have you ever been seen in a psychiatric or mental health clinic, or gone to a doctor, social worker or clergyman for help with an emotional problem related to drinking?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
24. Have you ever been arrested, even for a few hours, because of drinking?  
**Yes (2) for each arrest No (0)**
25. Have you ever been arrested for drunk driving?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**
26. Have you ever lost your driving licence?  
**Yes (2) No (0)**

## Interpretation

Standard MAST:

0-3 points = normal drinker

4 points = borderline score

5-9 points = 80% associated with alcoholism

10 or more = associated with alcoholism

Almost everyone drinks alcohol occasionally, but social drinking can easily become alcoholism. People will have numerous problems as a result of their alcohol consumption, before they ask themselves - **"am I an alcoholic?"**

## Risks of alcoholism

You have an increased risk of developing illnesses such as:-

- Serious liver disease (cirrhosis or hepatitis)
- Stomach and pancreas disorders
- Depression and anxiety
- Sexual difficulties
- Muscle and heart muscle disease
- High blood pressure
- Damage to nervous tissue
- Accidents - in particular injury and death from fire and car crashes
- Some cancers (mouth, gullet, liver, colon and breast)
- Obesity (alcohol has many calories).

Family difficulties. Emotional, financial, and psychological distress, divorce, family break-up, loss of respect, occurs in families where one member has a problem with drink. The drinker usually denies or refuses to accept that alcohol is the problem.

Loss of job and income, career, friends, social standing, professional standing.

## Alcohol and pregnancy

Women who drink heavily during pregnancy are at risk of having babies with foetal alcohol syndrome. This can result in babies with growth deficiencies, nervous system problems, lowered intelligence, and facial abnormalities. There is also evidence that pregnant women who drink 10 to 15 units a week are more likely to have underweight babies.

## How to treat alcoholism

If you have a problem with alcohol it is best to go and see your GP as soon as possible. Below is a list of organisations that can also help you.

## What to do if you have a problem?

Call the Pharmacist Health Support Programme in total confidence

**Tel: 0808 168 5132**

Or contact Pharmacist Support

**Tel: 0808 1682 233**

**Email: [info@pharmacistsupport.org](mailto:info@pharmacistsupport.org)**

## Further information

Alcoholics Anonymous

Tel: 0845 769 7555

Web: [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

AL-Anon Family Groups

Tel: 020 7403 0888

Web: [www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)