

This glancesheet looks at some common myths about alcohol, and presents the facts.

Myth: I can save up my drinks for the weekend

Truth: The recommended daily alcohol limits are 2-3 units for a woman and 3-4 units for a man. These amounts are intended to be spread out through the week, with at least two alcohol-free days in every seven. Saving up your units from the week and drinking them all at once could leave you with a nasty hangover in the morning and some embarrassing memories of the night before, as well as increasing your risk of injuries, fights and accidents.

Myth: I can drink alcohol and still be in control

Truth: Alcohol affects the brain like an anaesthetic, impairing judgement and coordination, and slowing reaction times, and so increasing your risk of accidents and injuries.

Myth: Drinking whilst pregnant is safe

Truth: Drinking alcohol whilst pregnant may harm the developing foetus, particularly during the earliest stages of pregnancy. The UK's Chief Medical Officers advise that if you are pregnant or trying to conceive, you should avoid drinking alcohol. If you do drink, you should drink no more than one or two units a week.

Myth: Alcohol improves sexual performance

Truth: Temporary impotence (or 'brewer's droop') after a bout of drinking is a common problem experienced by men. Men who drink heavily over a longer period may experience a loss of libido and potency, shrinking of the testes and a reduction in penis size. Long-term heavy alcohol use in women may result fertility problems, and the shrinking of breasts and sexual organs.

Myth: Alcohol gives me a boost

Truth: Alcohol is a depressant not a stimulant. It slows down how you think, move and react, and is unlikely to give you an energy lift. Mixing alcohol with sugary energy drinks may give you a temporary boost, but this is likely to be followed by greater fatigue and sugar cravings.

Myth: Alcohol helps me sleep.

Truth: Alcohol may make you feel sleepy and reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, but the quality of sleep is often poor. Studies show that alcohol consumed as much as six hours before bedtime will increase wakefulness during the second half of your sleep, and keep you from getting the deep sleep you need.

Myth: Alcohol is a winter warmer

Truth: Alcohol actually lowers your body temperature. Too much alcohol in very cold weather may even increase the risk of hypothermia.

Myth: Coffee sobers me up

Truth: Drinking coffee may make you feel more awake, but it will not make you less drunk or cure a hangover. Plus, coffee is diuretic – it makes you pass water – and so may even worsen post-drinking dehydration. Drinking caffeine may also make it harder for you to realise whether you are still drunk, leading to poor decision-making, such as driving whilst there's still alcohol in your blood.

Myth: Sport and drinking go hand in hand

Truth: Drinking alcohol actually worsens athletic performance. Exercising with alcohol in the body may produce greater amounts of lactate, which produces muscle pains and cramps. Drinking alcohol after taking part in sport or exercise is also not recommended as alcohol is a diuretic, making you pass too much urine and so increasing dehydration.

Myth: A trip to the gym will undo damage caused by drinking

Truth: Exercise may make you feel a little better after drinking, but it won't undo the effects of alcohol on your body. In fact, sweating during exercise may make you more dehydrated, and so worsen your hangover. You are also likely to have low blood sugar levels after any evening's drinking, meaning exercise will be a lot harder work.

Myth: There is nothing I can do to help someone with a drink problem

Truth: Many people are reluctant to admit they have a problem with alcohol, but there are many excellent support services in Wales that can help people take control of their drinking. If you are concerned about your own or someone else's drinking, please telephone DAN24/7 on 0808 141 0044. This is a free and bilingual service offering confidential help and advice.

OTHER GLANCESHEETS IN THIS SERIES:

- **Helping yourself? All about home drinking**
- **In your best interests? What the drinks industry wants you to hear**
- **Different industry, same messages? How Big Alcohol recycles Big Tobacco's arguments**

This glancesheet was prepared by Alcohol Concern Cymru.
For more facts about alcohol go to www.drinkwisewales.org.uk