



## Do You Drink Too Much?

How do you know if you're drinking too much? You may be drinking too often, too much at one time, or both. To determine whether you're drinking too much alcohol, you first need to determine if you are engaging in a risky or low risk drinking pattern.

### Risky vs. Low Risk Drinking

Understanding your drinking pattern is the first step to deciding whether it needs to be adjusted. Low risk drinking limits have been identified by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) as no more than four drinks per day AND no more than 14 drinks per week for men.<sup>1</sup> For women, NIAAA defines low risk drinking as no more than 3 drinks per day AND no more than 7 drinks per week.<sup>1</sup> These are guidelines for men and women to keep their alcohol consumption at a level that puts them at low risk for negative health effects. This does not mean there is no risk involved even when following these guidelines.

On the contrary, those who exceed these limits are considered "risky" or "heavy" drinkers. According to NIAAA, about one in four drinkers who engage in risky drinking already have an alcohol use disorder.<sup>1</sup> It's important to remember that it is both *how much* you drink and *how often* that could result in increased risk. In general, the more drinks you consume on a single day and the more often you drink more than the daily and weekly drinking limits as indicated, the greater risk to develop not only alcohol use disorders, but other health and personal problems.<sup>1</sup>

### Signs of Risky Drinking

There are signs that you or your friend may have a drinking problem and are at risk of an alcohol use disorder. If heavy drinking continues over a long period of time, the severity and quantity of potential harmful consequences increases. The signs below may help you identify risky behavior, earlier rather than later.<sup>1</sup>

- Drinking more or longer than you planned
- Failed attempts to cut down or stop drinking
- Putting yourself in harmful situations while under the influence of alcohol
- Having to drink more alcohol to get the "effect" a lesser amount used to give
- Having a memory blackout
- Feeling depressed or anxious after drinking



- Fighting with family and friends while under the influence or because of drinking

## Five Tips for Responsible Drinking

The below tips provide some ways in which you can practice safe drinking behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

- **Alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.** Pace your drinking by alternating every alcoholic drink with a glass of water.
- **Include food.** Always accompany alcohol with a meal.
- **Count your drinks.** Decide how many drinks you want to drink and stick to it. Make sure to track how much you're drinking and the quantity of alcohol in your drinks.
- **Plan activities that don't include alcohol.** If you notice your weekends are focused around drinking, plan other activities to participate in that don't involve alcohol.
- **Have goals.** Set a goal for how much money you want to spend on alcohol in a weekend, a goal for engaging in other activities that may be halted due to excessive alcohol use, and a goal for how many drinks you will have. Setting goals for your weekend will often keep you on track to have a productive and fun weekend!

## Where to Find Help

If you think you or a friend may be struggling with alcohol use, there are several Navy resources available for help. You can visit the Substance Abuse Rehabilitation Program (SARP) located at your local military treatment facility. For information on programs or responsible drinking tools, contact your Alcohol and Drug Control Officer (ADCO) or your command Drug and Alcohol Program Advisor (DAPA). For confidential communication, you can speak with your chaplain or may talk with DoD medical staff. Fleet and Family Support counselors are also available to provide counseling to you and your family members.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Rethinking Drinking: Alcohol and your health. [http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/RethinkingDrinking/Rethinking\\_Drinking.pdf](http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/RethinkingDrinking/Rethinking_Drinking.pdf).