



Public Health
England

UK CMOs Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines



CMOs low-risk drinking guidelines

- What has changed?
- Why has it changed?
- What might change in the future?
- What implications does it have for NHS Health Check?



What has changed?

- Recognition that there is no level of alcohol consumption that is completely without risk – no “safe” level, only “low-risk”
- Harmonising the low-risk levels for both men and women
- Move to weekly low-risk levels (away from daily levels)
- Stronger message about pregnancy



CMOs low-risk drinking guideline

- You are **safest not to drink regularly more than 14 units per week** to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level. This advice applies to both men and women
- It is best to **spread this drinking over 3 days or more** during the week
- A good way to help you keep the risk low is to **have several drink-free days each week**
- If you are **pregnant** or planning a pregnancy, **the safest approach is not to drink alcohol at all**, to keep risks to your baby to a minimum



10.4

Million Adults
in England are
drinking at levels
that pose some
risk to their health



**This means that roughly
1 in 4 adults might
benefit from reducing
their alcohol
consumption**



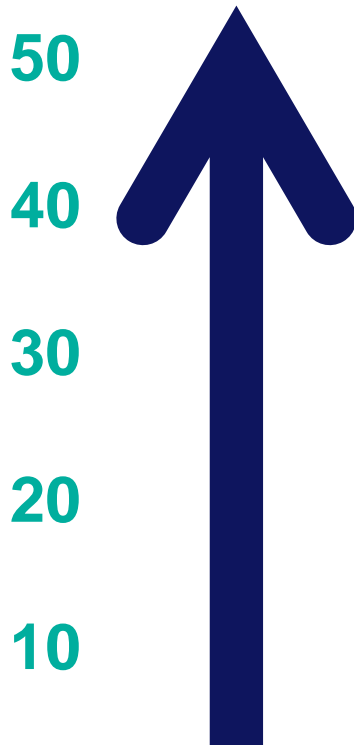
Why has it changed?

- The last review of the drinking message was in 1995
- This review considered evidence from 44 systematic reviews and meta-analyses published since 1995
- Latest research suggests that the overall health risks are broadly similar for men and women
- The level of risk from drinking is comparable to risks from some other regular or routine activities, such as driving
- Benefits for heart health of drinking alcohol are less and apply to a smaller group of the population than previously thought
- The links between alcohol and cancers are now better known
- Risks of low birth weight, preterm birth, and being small for gestational age all may increase above 1-2 units/day



Alcohol and the link to cancer

Units per week



- *The risk of cancer increases the more alcohol a person drinks*

liver and pancreas

- *Very little specific information on binge drinking (drinking large amounts of alcohol on a single occasion) and cancer*

voice box and large bowel

**mouth, throat, gullet, breast cancer
in women**



What might change in the future?

- Guideline group concentrated on low-risk. Higher-risk levels were not reviewed. PHE has been asked to conduct this review
- AUDIT-C, FAST and full AUDIT may need to change as a result
- All alcohol information leaflets and materials need to be amended to reflect the new guideline



Alcohol risk levels

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Low risk	Both men and women should not regularly drink more than 14 units per week spread over three or more days but also have drink-free days each week	
Increasing risk	Regularly drinking 15-50 units per week	Regularly drinking 15-35 units per week
Higher risk	More than 8 units per day on a regular basis or more than 50 units per week	More than 6 units per day on a regular basis or more than 35 units per week



Relative risk of death

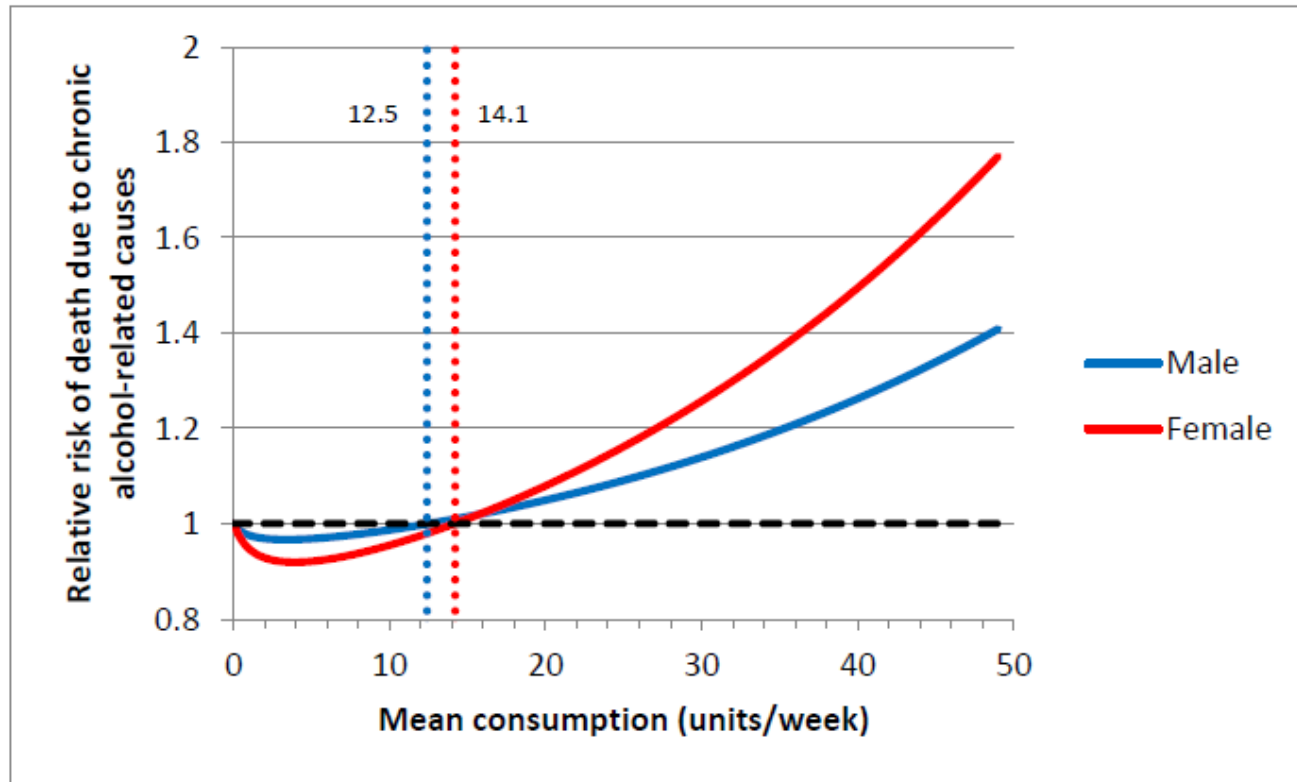


Figure 4: Relative risk of death due to chronic alcohol-related causes by mean weekly consumption level



AUDIT - C

Questions	Scoring system					Your score
	0	1	2	3	4	
How often do you have a drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2 - 4 times per month	2 - 3 times per week	4+ times per week	
How many units of alcohol do you drink on a typical day when you are drinking?	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 6	7 - 9	10+	
How often have you had 6 or more units if female, or 8 or more if male, on a single occasion in the last year?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	

Scoring:

A total of 5+ indicates increasing or higher risk drinking.
An overall total score of 5 or above is AUDIT-C positive.





FAST

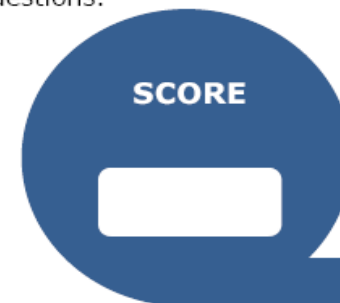
Questions	Scoring system					Your score
	0	1	2	3	4	
How often have you had 6 or more units if female, or 8 or more if male, on a single occasion in the last 6 months?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
Only answer the following questions if the answer above is monthly or less						
How often during the last 6 months have you failed to do what was normally expected from you because of your drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
How often during the last 6 months have you been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily	
Has a relative or friend, doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested that you cut down?	No		Yes, but not in the last year		Yes, during the last year	

Scoring:

A total of 0 – 2 on the first question then continue with the next three questions.

A total of 3 – 4 on the first question stop screening at first question.

An overall total score of 3 or above is FAST positive.





Implications for NHS Health Check?

- Not much (at this point)
- Screening tools are still valid and should continue to be used
- New guideline provides an opportunity to give strong, up-to-date advice to NHS Health Check recipients



Links to CMOs documents

- UK Chief Medical Officers' guidelines on how to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/alcohol-consumption-advice-on-low-risk-drinking>
- Alcohol Guidelines Review – Report from the Guidelines development group:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545739/GDG_report-Jan2016.pdf
- Consumption of alcoholic beverages and risk of cancer:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consumption-of-alcoholic-beverages-and-risk-of-cancer>



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