Reducing risks when drinking

Drinking too much, too quickly, on any single occasion can increase your risk of:

- Accidents resulting in injury, causing hospitalisation, prolonged disability or early death in some cases;
- Misjudging risky situations;
- Losing self-control of what you do or say and making risky decisions, such as having unprotected sex.

In order to reduce health risks from drinking, you should:

- Keep track and limit the number of drinks on any single occasion;
- Drink more slowly;
- Drink with food;
- Alternate alcohol drinks with water;
- Never drink and drive;
- Plan ahead to avoid problems, such as making sure you can get home safely or have trusted friends with you.

For more information, please contact the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate on 2326 6000 or call Aġenzija Sedqa on 2388 5110 or Supportline 179.
A standard drink always contains the same amount of alcohol, regardless of the container size or the type of alcoholic beverage. In Malta one standard drink is equivalent to 8 grams of alcohol. The alcohol content of a particular alcoholic drink depends on the strength of the beverage and the volume of the drink. Typically one standard drink is:

- A single shot of spirits, such as whisky, gin, and vodka (e.g. 25mls at 40% ABV)
- A small glass of liquor or aperitif (e.g. 40mls at 25% ABV)
- A glass of red wine (e.g. 80mls at 12.5% ABV)
- A glass of red wine

Alcohol by Volume (ABV) is the percentage of alcohol in the beverage. This can be found on the beverage label.

One small bottle (half a pint) of medium strength beer

Low-risk drinking: the facts

The ideal situation is to not drink alcohol at all. Although low-risk drinking refers to limiting drinking to amounts and patterns that are unlikely to cause harm, there is no definite safe level for drinking alcohol. Harm to one’s health arising from regular drinking can develop over many years. To keep health risks low, one should not drink more than fourteen standard drinks per week spread over five days. Even on special occasions one should never drink more than four standard drinks in any one day. No alcohol at all should be drunk on at least two days each week. This is valid both for men and women alike.

A small glass of aperitif or liqueur

How much is too much?

Some people choose not to drink alcohol. Others drink to socialize, celebrate or even relax. However some drink alcohol in harmful ways, such as when:

- Drinking more than two standard drinks/units in one day on a regular basis;  
- Binge drinking (drinking a large amount of alcohol in a short space of time);  
- Getting drunk;  
- Drinking to the extent of causing physical or mental harm;  
- Drinking patterns that result in alcohol dependence.

A standard drink

A standard drink (or unit of alcohol) always contains the same amount of alcohol, regardless of the container size or the type of alcoholic beverage. In Malta one standard drink is equivalent to 8 grams of alcohol. The alcohol content of a particular alcoholic drink depends on the strength of the beverage and the volume of the drink. Typically one standard drink is:

- A single shot of spirits, such as whisky, gin, and vodka (e.g. 250mls at 4.2% ABV)
- A small glass of liquor or aperitif (e.g. 25mls at 40% ABV)
- A glass of red wine

When driving or operating machinery;
When pregnant or breastfeeding;
When taking certain medications;
If one has certain medical conditions;
If one cannot control his/her drinking.

One should no drink at all:

A single shot of spirits, such as whisky, gin, and vodka (e.g. 25mls at 40% ABV)
A glass of red wine
A glass of red wine
A small glass of liquor or aperitif

Alcohol and cardiovascular disease

It had been suggested that one standard drink on alternate days reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases amongst middle-aged or older individuals. However it is now being considered that the real protective effect is less than previously thought.

Alcohol is closely associated with various types of cancers (such as colorectal, liver and breast), other diseases and conditions (such as liver cirrhosis and pancreatitis). The more you drink, the higher your risk.

If you want to decrease your risk of developing these diseases, you should limit alcohol as much as possible. If you do not drink at all, do not start. You can decrease your risk of cardiovascular diseases (and other diseases) by being physically active, quitting tobacco use and eating a healthier diet.

Alcohol by Volume (ABV) is the percentage of alcohol in the beverage. This can be found on the beverage label.