

# Did you look forward to last night's bottle of wine a bit too much? Ladies, you're not alone

25 February 2019, by Nicole Lee



Two standard drinks equals around 200ml of wine.  
Credit: [Chris Montgomery](#)

This month, close to 40,000 people, mostly women, have given up alcohol for [FebFast](#) and many others will be participating in [Dry July](#).

These events began as fundraisers for various social causes. But the [main reasons](#) people cite for participating are related to personal benefits, including giving their body a break from [alcohol](#) and improving their health.

The proportion of young people drinking has decreased over the past ten years. But more women in their 40s and 50s are drinking at risky levels. And women are catching up to men when it comes to drinking at levels that damage health.

Women's relationship with alcohol has become a hot topic. Many women, including celebrities [Nigella Lawson](#), [Kristen Davis](#) and [Jada Pinkett Smith](#), have been vocal about their decisions to reduce drinking to improve their health and well-

being.

## Women are affected by alcohol more than men

Women start to have [alcohol-related problems sooner](#) and at lower drinking levels than men.

If a man and a woman drink the same amount, in general a woman's blood alcohol concentration will be higher.

Women tend to be smaller and lighter than men; a person who is a lighter weight or who has a smaller body frame will be more affected than someone who weighs more or has a larger body frame. If the same amount of alcohol is going into a smaller body there will be a higher concentration of alcohol.

Even if a man and woman are the same size, women tend to have a higher percentage of body fat and a lower percentage of body water than men.

Dehydrogenase is the enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the body. Women tend to have less active dehydrogenase and therefore take longer to process alcohol, so they will get drunk faster and have alcohol in their system for longer.

Women who drink experience [health problems sooner](#) and that are more severe than men who drink the same amount.

## Women are less likely to seek help

Even when women are experiencing problems with alcohol, they are less likely to seek help than men. Women represent only one-third of Australians who [receive treatment](#) from a specialist alcohol and drug treatment service.

Barriers to women seeking treatment include [social stigma](#), fear of losing their children, and lack of [availability of specific programs](#) for women.

### How can too much affect your health?

Alcohol can increase the risk of significant health problems, including [cancer](#), [brain damage](#), [liver disease](#) and [heart disease](#).

Women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant should not drink alcohol at all until the baby is born.

If you drink while [pregnant](#), the alcohol can go through your blood and to the baby. This can cause deformities and cognitive damage in the baby, known as [fetal alcohol syndrome](#).

If you are breastfeeding, small amounts of alcohol can go through the breast milk to the baby. It's better to drink after breastfeeding times rather than before or during.

### How much is too much?

The idea that a little bit of alcohol is good for your health has [now been debunked](#).

The [Australian alcohol guidelines](#) recommend [healthy adults](#) (men and women) should drink no more than two [standard drinks](#) on any day to reduce lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease.

The guidelines also recommend consuming a maximum of four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury.

The percentage of pure alcohol varies across different types of drinks, so the guidelines convert alcohol to [standard drinks](#). In Australia, a standard drink contains ten grams of alcohol, which equates to 100mls of wine or 285mls of regular strength beer or cider (a stubbie or pot) or 30mls of regular strength spirit. A cosmopolitan or mojito typically has two or three standard drinks.

### Signs you need may need to cut back

- drinking every day or nearly every day? Daily drinking is associated with dependence
- drinking more than [the recommended limits](#)? Drinking more than two drinks on any day is associated with long-term health problems
- needing to drink more to get the same effect? This indicates growing tolerance to alcohol and is an early sign of dependence
- having difficulty taking a break or cutting back, or drinking more than you intended to? These are signs that you have less control over how much you drink
- finding that drinking is interfering with day-to-day activities on a regular basis, for example being late for work because you have a hangover?
- noticing your well-being is affected, for example, you get feelings of anxiety or depression during or after drinking, or you have trouble sleeping? Alcohol can be relaxing while you are drinking, but it can make anxiety, depression and sleep problems worse
- doing things while you are drinking that you later regret?

If so, it's time to reassess your drinking. This [online assessment tool](#) may help.

### How to cut back

If you're drinking more than you'd like to, make a plan to cut back. This might include:

- setting a limit that reduces health risks
- having alcohol-free days every week
- having non-alcoholic "spacers" before and in-between alcoholic drinks
- sipping your drinks rather than gulping them down. Slowing your drinking enables your body to process the alcohol and you also end up drinking less
- trying drinks with a lower alcohol content
- eating before and/or while you are drinking. This helps slow the absorption of alcohol
- avoiding "shots". If you do, don't feel like

you need to keep up with everyone else.  
You can skip a round or two.

### **Where to get help cutting back or quitting**

Most [women](#) who drink alcohol, even those who drink a little too much, don't need specialist treatment, but taking a break from alcohol can improve your physical and mental well-being.

If you need help to cut back there are some resources online that may help (such as [Hello Sunday Morning](#)).

Your GP is a good place to start if you have questions or concerns about your [drinking](#).

You can also talk to someone on the phone or online for information:

[CounsellingOnline](#) is a free online chat for concerns about alcohol and other drugs. Anyone can use it – people using drugs and people wanting to help friends or family using drugs.

National Alcohol and other Drug Hotline is a free telephone information and counselling service similar to CounselingOnline, but on the phone. They can be reached at 1800 250 015.

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