

# HOW TOO MUCH ALCOHOL AFFECTS THE BODY

## Brain

Too much alcohol acts a depressant on the brain, the control centre of the body. It can make the drinker feel happy for a little while, but any improvement in mood is temporary and people usually feel worse after drinking too much. Alcohol can depress the central nervous system leading to slurred speech, unsteady movement, disturbed perceptions, and an inability to react quickly. Long-term drinking can kill off brain cells and lead to memory loss and mental problems as well as alcohol dependency.

## Head

After a few drinks, behaviour changes. The person drinking may feel more relaxed, emotional and uninhibited, but they also lose control. Their judgement is affected too. They might make a fool of themselves, get into trouble, cause an accident or do something they regret later. Every year, 18-22% of accidental deaths are alcohol-related. Alcohol draws water out of the brain. So, as the body starts to break down alcohol, the drinker may feel dizzy and be in for a throbbing headache if they drink too much.

## Heart

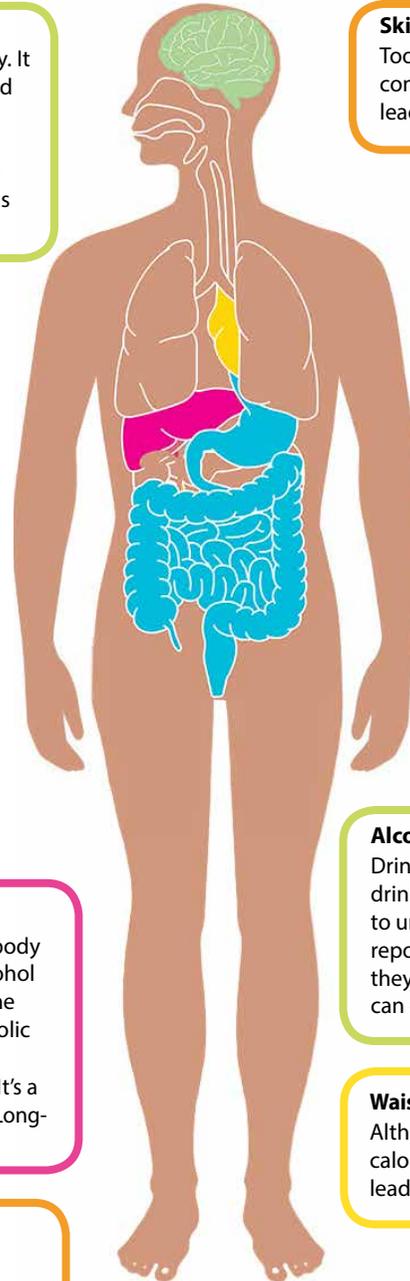
Drinking large quantities of alcohol over a short period can cause irregular heart beats and shortness of breath, leading to panic attacks and illness. Moderate drinking, that is 1 or 2 units a day, may offer some protection from heart disease in men over 40 and in post-menopausal women, but it is not advised that an adult takes up drinking if they don't already. It is more important to be physically active, eat a healthy, balanced diet and to avoid smoking.

## Liver

The liver breaks down most of the alcohol a person drinks (the rest leaves the body in breath, urine and sweat). But it can only break down about 1 unit (8g) of alcohol an hour in an average adult. More than that, and it stops working properly. If the body can't cope with all the alcohol in its system, the person falls into an alcoholic coma (which can be fatal). Long-term heavy drinking kills off liver cells, leading to a disease called cirrhosis. It's a 'silent' disease – symptoms may not be noticeable until the disease is advanced. Long-term excessive drinking can also lead to liver cancer.

## Armpits

Excess alcohol is also excreted as smelly body odour and bad breath - not great for attracting partners.



## Skin

Too much alcohol dehydrates the body, which is bad news for the skin and complexion. It also dilates the blood vessels under the surface of the skin, leading to ugly veins on the nose and cheeks.

## Eyes

Too much alcohol dilates blood vessels in the eyes, so they can look red and bloodshot. It also affects the signals sent from the eyes to the brain - vision becomes blurred, and distances and speeds get harder to judge. Many road accidents involve drivers or pedestrians who have alcohol in their blood. Too much alcohol also suppresses REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. It's the most important phase of sleep so drinking heavily can ruin the chance of a good night's rest.

## Gut

Alcohol is absorbed from the stomach into the bloodstream. The body's ability to process alcohol depends on various things, like age, weight and sex. Alcohol breaks down in the body at a rate of roughly one unit per hour and therefore drinking more than one unit of alcohol an hour will build up the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) and it may be many hours before it is safe to drive. After a night of heavy drinking a person risks being over the drink drive limit the next morning. Learn more at [morning-after.org.uk](http://morning-after.org.uk)

## Alcohol and sex

Drinking too much alcohol can affect performance in the bedroom because the drinker is not fully in control of their body. Alcohol affects judgement too, leading to unsafe sex. 40% of 16-24 year-old girls and 31% of boys of the same age group reported having had unprotected sex after binge drinking. If someone is pregnant, they shouldn't drink because alcohol crosses the placenta directly to the baby and can cause Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

## Waist

Although alcohol is fat free, it is very calorific (only fat contains more calories per gram) and increases your appetite, so excess drinking can lead to weight gain.

For more information, please visit [talkaboutalcohol.com/interactive-body/](http://talkaboutalcohol.com/interactive-body/)