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# **Australian alcohol guidelines for low-risk drinking**

Draft for public consultation

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**National Health and Medical Research Council**

# Summary

This edition of the Australian Alcohol Guidelines (*Australian Guidelines for Low-Risk Drinking*) contains three distinct types of health advice:

- *A single, universal guideline* for Australian adults that provides a recommended low-risk drinking level to reduce both the immediate and long-term harm from alcohol consumption (**Guideline 1**).
- *Two guidelines with special precautions* for children and adolescents, and for pregnant and breastfeeding women (**Guidelines 2 and 3**).
- *Additional health advice and precautions* for specific groups of adults who have an increased risk (such as young adults, older people, people with a family history of alcohol dependence), for people with physical or mental conditions made worse by alcohol, and for specific situations (such as taking part in high-risk activities or using illicit drugs).

This edition of the Australian Alcohol Guidelines presents data that clearly show the level of risk associated with different patterns and levels of drinking. Increasing levels of alcohol intake are associated with increasing risk of alcohol-related accidents, injuries, disease and death.

**Guideline 1** recommends a single, universal low-risk level of alcohol intake for both men and women. In setting the guideline, the NHMRC considered the risks of increasing levels of alcohol intake for two patterns of drinking and two types of harm:

- drinking on any single occasion with the attendant risk of accidents and injuries
- regular drinking over a period of time with the attendant risk of developing alcohol-related diseases.

In each case, ‘low-risk’ has been conservatively defined as the level of alcohol intake that, for healthy adults, will:

- keep the risk of accidents and injuries, or of developing alcohol-related diseases, at tolerably low levels (compared with not drinking)
- reduce the lifetime risk of death from an alcohol-related injury, or from an alcohol-related disease, to less than 1 in 100 (that is, one death for every 100 people who drink at that specified level and pattern).

To achieve these outcomes, the recommended alcohol intake for both men and women is the same: two standard drinks or less in any one day.

Importantly, **Guideline 1** does not represent a ‘safe’ or ‘no-risk’ drinking level; neither is it a proscriptive level of drinking that must be followed in all situations. Rather, it is an advisory drinking level that will enable healthy adults to maintain a low risk of alcohol-related accidents, injuries, diseases and death. Drinking at levels higher than this recommended level of alcohol intake is associated with a significantly increasing risk of these complications and the risk of death from alcohol-related disease escalates much more rapidly for women than for men.

## **What is a standard drink?**

In Australia, a standard drink is any drink containing 10 grams of alcohol. One standard drink always contains the same amount of alcohol regardless of container size or alcohol type (ie, beer, wine, or spirit).

A standard drink is a unit of measurement. In the same way one metre measures a particular distance travelled, one standard drink measures a particular amount of alcohol consumed.

### **What is the standard drink used for?**

Instead of counting glasses or containers, drinkers count standard drinks as a way of keeping track of how much alcohol they consume. Counting standard drinks is a much more reliable measure of how much alcohol is consumed compared to counting glasses, bottles, or cans.

Counting glasses, bottles, or cans of alcohol can be misleading because they can contain varying amounts of alcohol.

The consumption limits in the Australian Alcohol Guidelines (that are under review in 2008) are based on the standard drink concept.

### **How many standard drinks in....?**

The number of standard drinks in alcohol beverages is always shown on the label of the container.

**Examples of how many standard drinks are in typical containers** - always check the label or ask bar staff.

**Further information is available at:**

[www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/health](http://www.alcohol.gov.au/internet/alcohol/publishing.nsf/Content/health)

# Standard Drink Guide



**1.1** 285ml  
**1.6** 425ml  
Full Strength Beer  
4.9% Alc./Vol



**0.8** 285ml  
**1.2** 425ml  
Mid Strength Beer  
3.5% Alc./Vol



**0.6** 285ml  
**0.9** 425ml  
Light Beer  
2.7% Alc./Vol



**1.5**  
375ml  
Full Strength Beer  
4.9% Alc./Vol



**1**  
375ml  
Mid Strength Beer  
3.5% Alc./Vol



**0.8**  
375ml  
Light Beer  
2.7% Alc./Vol



**1.5**  
375ml  
Pre-mix Spirits  
5% Alc./Vol



**1.2**  
300ml  
Pre-mix Spirits  
5% Alc./Vol



**1**  
30ml  
Spirit Nip  
40% Alc./Vol



**22**  
700ml  
Bottle of Spirits  
40% Alc./Vol



**1**  
30ml  
Spirit Shot  
40% Alc./Vol



**1**  
60ml  
Port/Sherry  
Glass  
20% Alc./Vol



**1.5**  
170ml  
Average Serve of  
Sparkling Wine/  
Champagne  
11.5% Alc./Vol



**1.5**  
150ml  
Average Serve  
of Wine  
12.5% Alc./Vol



**7.5**  
750ml  
Bottle  
of Wine  
12.5% Alc./Vol

**Note.** Labels on alcoholic drink containers state the number of Standard Drinks in the container.

**Check the label to find out how many Standard Drinks are in the bottle or can.**

**The Standard Drinks shown are calculated to one decimal place. To make counting your drinks easier, you can round the numbers up or down. For example count 0.9 as 1.0 and 1.6 as 1.5.**