

ALCOHOL

South Africa's alcohol consumption rate has climbed, with the country now ranked as one of the top 20 biggest drinking nations in the world. This is according to a statistical update from the World Health Organization in 2015 which tracks alcohol consumption per person across 194 countries.

Alcohol consumption among those who drink amounts to a staggering 27,1 litres a person a year in South Africa. More than a quarter of drinkers are considered binge drinkers, consuming at least 60 g or more pure alcohol in one session in a 30-day period.

Excessive alcohol intake is the third most important risk factor for developing a chronic disease such as cardiovascular disease (heart attacks and stroke), cancers, diabetes and lung disease. It can also speed up how fast infectious diseases progress. Alcohol is a prominent factor in violence and injuries, including interpersonal violence, domestic violence, sexual assault and road traffic injuries in South Africa.

HOW TO DRINK IN MODERATION

Remember these important tips to help you drink in moderation if you drink:

- Alcohol is only for over 18's
- Know your own limit
- Eat before you drink
- Don't drink and drive
- Stop before you've had too much
- Drink slowly, with non-alcoholic beverages in between
- Avoid alcohol when you're taking medicine
- Change the way you socialise – try outdoor or sporting activities with friends rather than meeting for drinks.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The legal limit is a breath alcohol concentration of 0.24 mg per 1 000 ml, or a blood alcohol content limit of **0.05 g per 100 ml**.

According to the Automobile Association of South Africa, the rule of thumb is a maximum of one unit of alcohol per hour, which is 10 ml of pure alcohol, based on an adult weighing 68 kg. Our bodies can process only one unit of alcohol each hour. It's important to remember that if you weigh less than 68 kg, your body will need more time to process the same amount of alcohol.

WHAT IS A UNIT?

- Two-thirds of a beer or spirit cooler with 5% alcohol content
- 75 ml of red or white wine an hour with an alcohol content of 12% to 14%
- One 25 ml tot whiskey or brandy an hour.

PAYING THE PRICE

Overindulgence is associated with impaired physical and mental function, memory loss, and headache in the short term. In the long term, excessive alcohol consumption is associated with increased risk of cirrhosis (chronic liver damage), dementia, depression, seizures, gout, hypertension (high blood pressure) and liver cancer.

SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL ADDICTION

It's not always easy to see when your own drinking has crossed the line from moderate or social to problem drinking. If you drink to cope with difficulties or to avoid feeling bad, you're potentially in dangerous territory.

The signs of dependency (developed by John Hopkins University Hospital) include:

- #1** Continuing to drink even though it causes problems in your relationships, jeopardises your reputation or affects your work performance
- #2** Drinking as a way to relax, de-stress, build confidence, or escape
- #3** Having difficulty sleeping, or experiencing complete memory loss
- #4** Drinking alone, or craving a drink at certain times of the day.

You can take the full test at <http://www.aasouthafrica.org.za/IsAAForYou/AreyouanAlcoholic.aspx>

THERAPY OPTIONS FOR ALCOHOLISM

Individual counselling

If you don't feel comfortable in a group setting, a therapist who can offer individual counselling may be useful. One-on-one cognitive behavioural therapy is often used to develop coping tools for underlying issues. Long-term treatment is more effective and reduces the chance of relapse compared to once-off intervention sessions, whatever the choice of treatment. Chat to your Healthy Company coach about available options for face-to-face counselling and to assist you in setting up an appointment.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

This international fellowship of people uses a 12-step programme to offer alcoholics a new way of living without alcohol. The idea is to provide a safe and friendly environment where alcoholics can share personal stories and learn about the practical challenges when quitting alcohol, build their confidence and experience group support.

Rehabilitation clinics

In-patient treatment allows people to break away completely from their usual drinking triggers such as alcohol availability, drinking buddies and life stressors, all of which may contribute to alcohol dependency. Once the alcoholic has been through withdrawal and therapy, they are more likely to be able to cope in their normal environment.

Resources

Alcoholics Anonymous South Africa
<http://www.aasouthafrica.org.za>

CHAT TO HEALTHY COMPANY FOR FREE ADVICE

Healthy Company is here for you. Contact us through the Discovery app, www.discovery.co.za or 0800 320 420