

AMA Healthier Life Steps™

A Physician's Guide to Personal Health

Action plan for reducing risky drinking

The goal

We know that alcohol causes significant morbidity and mortality. It's strongly recommended that physicians engaging in patient care have no significant body content of alcohol and that all physicians, prior to being available for patient care, refrain from ingesting an amount of alcohol that has the potential to cause impairment of performance.

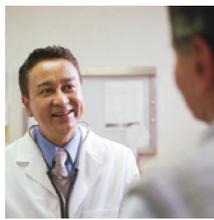
Outside of work, those who choose to drink alcoholic beverages should do so sensibly and in moderation—defined by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 as the consumption of up to one drink per day for women or two drinks per day for men. However, the recommended *limits* for number of drinks are:

- On any day, never more than three drinks for women or four for men
- In a typical week, no more than seven drinks for women or 14 for men

Issues that lead to excessive alcohol intake may dictate screening for depression and/or burnout.

Some people shouldn't drink at all, including:

- Women who are trying to become pregnant
- People planning to drive or engage in other activities requiring alertness and skill (such as using machinery)
- People taking certain over-the-counter or prescription medications
- People with medical or psychiatric conditions caused by drinking or that can be made worse by drinking
- Recovering alcoholics or those with alcohol use disorder



Get ready

Are you concerned about your use of alcohol? Do you think you might be ready for a change?

1. Answer the following honestly (check all that apply to you):

- I believe my drinking is out of control, and I would like to cut down or eliminate it altogether
- Drinking has begun to interfere with my medical practice or personal life
- Drinking interferes with my sleep
- Drinking interferes with taking care of myself
- My family and friends have remarked on my drinking and behavior; my colleagues and clinical staff may even be aware of it
- One or more people have expressed concern about my drinking

2. With the previous question in mind, check all of the following that are important to you. Then circle the one you would like to address first:

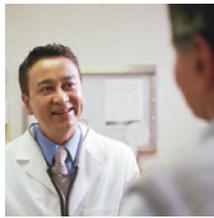
- Reduce the amount I drink
- Reduce how often I drink
- Change the situations in which I drink (e.g., activity, place, companions)

Make a plan

Now write a specific plan to meet your goal and include your start date. Track your efforts and achievements on your **Reducing risky drinking progress tracking calendar**, which is enclosed in this packet (or visit www.ama-assn.org/go/healthierlifesteps to download a copy).

This is my goal: _____

Some things I will do to reach this goal: _____



Make a plan *(continued)*

This is why I want to reach this goal (reminder of your motivation):

This is who I'm going to tell (list the people you can count on for support with your plan):

Take action

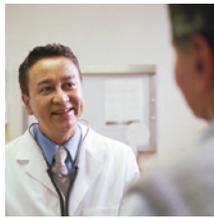
Set goals

A good idea is to have some days when you don't drink. Drinking within the recommended limits (see below) reduces the chances of having an alcohol use disorder and related health problems. Depending on your health status, your primary care physician may advise you to drink less or not drink at all.

- **For healthy men up to age 65 who choose to drink:**
 - Moderate drinking: up to two drinks on any day
 - Never more than four drinks on any one day, AND
 - Never more than 14 drinks in a week
- **For healthy women up to age 65 who choose to drink (excluding pregnant women, of course):**
 - Moderate drinking: up to one drink on any day
 - Never more than three drinks on any one day, AND
 - Never more than seven drinks in a week
- **For healthy men and women over 65:**
 - No more than one drink on any one day

I plan to maintain my level of alcohol intake or decrease it by:

Date



Factors for success

- Share your goals and progress with a colleague, friend or life partner
- Share your goals and progress with your physician
- Include food—eat before you drink to slow alcohol absorption, and avoid salty snacks

Useful resources

- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) clinical guidelines and related resources on alcohol use**
www.niaaa.nih.gov/Publications/EducationTrainingMaterials/guide.htm
- **“How to Cut Down on Your Drinking”**
An online brochure from NIAAA with tips about cutting down and forms to help you track your drinking.
<http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/handout.htm>
- **Additional pamphlets from NIAAA about alcohol problems**
These materials cover cutting down, alcoholism in the family, alcohol and pregnancy, and which medicines are harmful to mix with alcohol, and are available in English and Spanish.
www.niaaa.nih.gov/Publications/PamphletsBrochuresPosters/English/
- **“Join Together,” Boston University School of Public Health**
A free alcohol consumption assessment tool to help you determine if your drinking is likely to be harmful and help you to decide what to do.
www.AlcoholScreening.org
- **Boston University alcohol screening and brief intervention curriculum**
www.bu.edu/act/mdalcoholtraining/index.html

For local help

- **Alcoholics Anonymous**
www.aa.org
- **National Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator**
<http://dasis3.samhsa.gov/>