

Alcohol and viral hepatitis



FACTSHEET 01

Hepatitis Council of Qld



It is often difficult to abstain from drinking alcohol in a culture where it is socially accepted and commonly used in social and work settings

The harmful effects of alcohol

Alcohol is poisonous to the liver (hepatotoxic). If you have hepatitis B or C, one of the best things you can do for yourself is to cut out drinking or cut down as much as you can.

Alcohol may increase damage to your liver and may cause liver scarring (cirrhosis) and liver cancer (hepatocellular carcinoma). Alcohol can also make hepatitis treatment less effective and interact with other medication or illicit drugs. So it's important that you discuss these with your doctor or health care service.

If you have hepatitis B or C, the ideal is that you don't drink any alcohol at all. If you do drink it is important to limit the amount consumed to reduce further possible damage to your liver.

How much can I drink?

If you have hepatitis B or C it is recommended that you drink **no more than**:

- **ONE standard drink per day, with at least**
- **THREE alcohol-free days per week.**

However everyone is different. For people with hepatitis B or C, alcohol may cause liver or abdominal pains and fatigue the following day, so 'listen to your liver'. If you have liver scarring or liver cancer, you are advised not to drink any

alcohol at all. If you do drink, monitor your own use and the ways in which alcohol affects you.

What is a 'standard drink'?

One standard drink equates to:

- 10g of alcohol or 30mL of spirits; or
- 60mL of port or sherry, or 100mL of wine; or
- 250mL of standard-strength beer; or
- 375mL of mid-strength beer; or
- 425mL of light beer.

Signs that you might need to cut down on alcohol:

- Fatigue;
- Liver/abdominal/stomach pains;
- Difficulty in managing the amount you drink;
- Withdrawal symptoms (tremors or anxiety);
- Increased stress levels or disrupted sleep;
- Relationship or sexual difficulties;
- Increased aggression or violence;
- Diminished judgement and performance.

Binge Drinking

Binge drinking occurs when a person drinks heavily over a short period of time resulting in immediate and severe intoxication. Binge drinking is sometimes defined as '*drinking to get drunk*'. Health risks associated with binge drinking include hangovers, headaches, and stomach problems resulting in nausea, shakiness and vomiting.

Will alcohol affect my treatment outcomes?

If you decide to have treatment for hepatitis B or C (or are currently on treatment), how much

The ABC of Hepatitis Training Package is an initiative of Queensland Health through funding provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing under the National Hepatitis C Prevention and Education Initiative

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For more information www.hepqld.asn.au
or Hepatitis Council of Qld info line **1800 648 491**

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alcohol you drink can make an impact on how effective treatment is. The less alcohol you drink, the more likely you are to respond to treatment and have either a sustained virological response (for hepatitis C) or long-term suppression of viral replication (for hepatitis B).

What can I do to help manage my alcohol intake?

If cutting out alcohol entirely is not an option for you, consider reducing the amount you drink, or try one week without any alcohol. Then measure how you felt the week you reduced or gave up alcohol, compared with the week when you drank. The change in your health may be enough for you to consider longer-term strategies for reducing or giving up alcohol. Some simple ways to help you manage your alcohol intake include:

- Avoid binge drinking – it places a heavy strain on your liver;
- Start with a non-alcoholic drink, especially if you are thirsty;
- Try not to drink in rounds – determine your own drinking pace;
- Eat a substantial meal before drinking;
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones;
- Switch to low-alcohol drinks; and
- Have several alcohol-free days per week.

Interested in finding out more?

Factsheets

- 03 Combination therapy
- 06 What is a healthy diet?
- 13 Harm minimisation and hepatitis
- 27 Response to treatment
- 33 Support
- 37 Hepatitis B: what you need to know

Organisations

- Alcohol and Drug Information Service (a free telephone counseling service which operates 24 hours a day) – phone (07) 3837 5989 or 1800 177 833
- Lifeline – phone 13 11 14
- Gallang Place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Counseling – phone (07) 3844 2283 (specialising in alcohol and other drug counseling for Indigenous Australians)

Booklets

- Moving on after treatment: a post-treatment guide for people with hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia & ANCAHRD*)
- The Guide to Healthy Eating for People with Hepatitis C (*Hepatitis Australia*)
- Hepatitis B, C, and Alcohol: Am I drinking too much? (*Hepatitis Council of QLD*)
- Hepatitis C Information Kit (*Hepatitis Council of QLD*)

“I was prescribed complete abstinence from alcoholic beverages. It was difficult. I obliged and it was followed by an immediate disappearance of the discomfort felt on my right side”



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