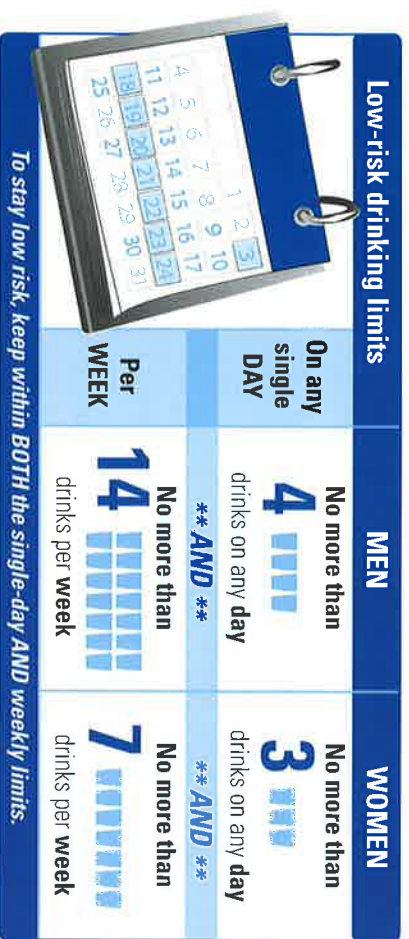


## What's "low-risk" drinking?

A major nationwide survey of 43,000 U.S. adults by the National Institutes of Health shows that only about 2 in 100 people who drink within both the "single-day" and weekly limits below have alcoholism or alcohol abuse. How do these "low-risk" levels compare with your drinking pattern from page 3?



"Low risk" is *not* "no risk." Even within these limits, drinkers can have problems if they drink too quickly, have health problems, or are older (both men and women over 65 are generally advised to have no more than 3 drinks on any day and 7 per week). Based on your health and how alcohol affects you, you may need to drink less or not at all.

## What's "heavy" or "at-risk" drinking?

For healthy adults in general, drinking more than the single-day or weekly amounts shown above is considered "at-risk" or "heavy" drinking. About 1 in 4 people who drink this much already has alcoholism or alcohol abuse, and the rest are at greater risk for developing these and other problems.

It makes a difference both *how much* you drink on any day and *how often* you have a "heavy drinking day"—that is, more than 4 drinks in a day for men or more than 3 drinks for women. The more drinks in a day and the more heavy drinking days over time, the greater the chances for problems (see "What's the harm?" on the next page).

### Why are women's low-risk limits different from men's?

Research shows that women start to have alcohol-related problems at lower drinking levels than men do. One reason is that, on average, women weigh less than men. In addition, alcohol disperses in body water, and pound for pound, women have less water in their bodies than men do. So after a man and woman of the same weight drink the same amount of alcohol, the woman's blood alcohol concentration will tend to be higher, putting her at greater risk for harm.

## How much do U.S. adults drink?

The majority—7 out of 10—either abstain or always drink within low-risk limits. Which group are you in?



## What's the harm?

Not all drinking is harmful. You may have heard that regular light to moderate drinking (from ½ drink a day up to 1 drink a day for women and 2 for men) can even be good for the heart. With at-risk or heavy drinking, however, any potential benefits are outweighed by greater risks.

**Injuries.** Drinking too much increases your chances of being injured or even killed. Alcohol is a factor, for example, in about 60% of fatal burn injuries, drownings, and homicides; 50% of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults; and 40% of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides, and fatal falls.

**Health problems.** Heavy drinkers have a greater risk of liver disease, heart disease, sleep disorders, depression, stroke, bleeding from the stomach, sexually transmitted infections from unsafe sex, and several types of cancer. They may also have problems managing diabetes, high blood pressure, and other conditions.

**Birth defects.** Drinking during pregnancy can cause brain damage and other serious problems in the baby. Because it is not yet known whether any amount of alcohol safe for a developing baby, women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not drink.

**Alcohol use disorders.** Generally known as alcoholism and alcohol abuse, alcohol use disorders are medical conditions that doctors can diagnose when a patient's drinking causes distress or harm. In the United States, about 18 million people have an alcohol use disorder. See the next page for symptoms