



Alcohol

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Alongside with tobacco, alcohol is one of the most commonly consumed legal drugs.

It is created by the fermentation of sugar from fruits and other sources of sugar (*potatoes, grains or maize*) and is consumed in the form of beer or wine, for example. The fermented brew can be made (*distilled*) into schnapps or other spirits.



Main active ingredient

- Ethanol (*drinkable alcohol*)



Legal status

- Legal
- It is prohibited from being sold and served to minors under the age of 16
- Alcohol limit if driving: 0.5 ‰ (0.2 ‰ for non-adult drivers, provisional drivers, professional drivers, accompanied drivers ("conduite accompagnée"))*



Consumption modalities

- Orally (*beverages, meals, in medication*)



Onset and duration of effect

- **Onset:** a few minutes after consumption; maximum effect after 30 - 60 minutes
- **Duration:** 0.1 - 0.2 ‰ decrease in blood alcohol concentration per hour



Effects

- Stimulant, increased sociability and talkativeness
- Disinhibitory, causes anxiety, muscle relaxant
- Boosts libido
- Stupefying, narcotic



Risks and side effects

- Decline in receptiveness and powers of concentration
- Impaired reactivity
- Coordination and balance problems, speech problems
- Increased aggressiveness (*as assailant and/or victim*)
- Decline in critical faculties and powers of judgement, greater appetite for risk: risky behaviour (*e.g. when driving*), falls, accidents, unprotected/unwanted sex
- Body temperature falls, blood vessels dilate
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fatigue, falling asleep
- Impaired vision (*"tunnel vision", double vision*)
- Memory loss (*"mental blanks", "blackout"*)
- "Hangover" (*the day after*): headaches, nausea, giddiness, fatigue, depressive mood
- Danger to life: alcohol poisoning, hypothermia, respiratory paralysis, respiratory arrest



Long-term risks

- Addiction
- Sleep disorders
- Bouts of depression, anxiety disorders, personality changes
- Memory disorders
- Organ damage (*liver, pancreas, cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal tract, brain, nervous system, amongst others*)
- Cancers (*liver, breast, stomach, oesophagus, larynx, buccal and pharyngeal cavity, among others*)



Worth knowing...

- ✓ Alcohol is a cytotoxin, reaching the bloodstream via the stomach and small intestine. It therefore spreads throughout the body, potentially damaging all organs.
- ✓ There are no “tricks” for accelerating the elimination of alcohol from the body. Most of the alcohol is eliminated by the liver: neither sleep, coffee, sport nor fresh air can fast-track this elimination process, although they may subjectively enhance a sense of well-being.
- ✓ Sugar and carbon dioxide accelerate the absorption of alcohol and its effect. Also, sweetness conceals the taste of alcohol, its effect often being underestimated as a consequence.
- ✓ Women typically have a higher per mill level than men for the same alcohol consumption. This is attributable due to the smaller proportion of body water in women and slower alcohol elimination in the liver.
- ✓ The typically lower body weight of children and adolescents results in the alcohol having a (*potentially drastically*) greater effect.
- ✓ The frequently used term “binge drinking” is misleading. Most adolescents, and adults as well, do not intend to drink themselves senseless. Typically, those who have to be hospitalised with alcohol poisoning have underestimated the effect of the alcohol.
- ✓ In the case of alcohol addiction, physical withdrawal (*detoxification*) should always be conducted under medical supervision, because an abrupt end to alcohol consumption can trigger life-threatening withdrawal symptoms.

Tips for responsible use of alcohol

- For healthy adults, low risk consumption is deemed to be:
 - for men, a maximum of two standard glasses of alcohol per day
 - for women, a maximum of one standard glass of alcohol per day
 - refrain from alcohol for at least two days a week

What is meant by one standard class of alcohol is a glass containing between 10 and 12 grams of pure alcohol, e.g. beer (0.3 l), wine (0.1 l), schnapps (4 cl)



- Do not drink too quickly and too much (*no drinking games, take breaks, e.g. with non-alcoholic beverages*)
- Do not use alcohol to quench your thirst
- Do not drink alcohol when performance, concentration and quick reactions are required: driving, workplace/school, sport
- Refrain from alcohol during pregnancy and breastfeeding
- Clarify what risks alcohol consumption poses given existing ailments
- When celebrating together (*party etc.*) keep an eye out for one another and make sure you get home safely.

Periodically go without alcohol e.g. live alcohol free for 4 weeks and see to what extent one has become habituated to alcohol and how important it is (*then change drinking habits, where appropriate*).

→ In an emergency or if in doubt
always call the emergency number.



Signs of risky drinking habits

- If alcohol is playing an increasingly important role in your life (*strong cravings*)
- Alcohol consumption has not been curbed despite bad experiences (e.g. *mental blanks, arguments with friends/family, violence*)
- Loss of control over starting and stopping drinking:
 - for example, one repeatedly resolves not to drink alcohol but then does
 - one fails to curb one's evening alcohol intake
- If one is able to drink increasing amounts of alcohol without becoming drunk (*habituation*)
- If one needs more alcohol to achieve the desired effect (*dose escalation*)
- Alcohol consumption in inappropriate situations, e.g.:
 - if performance, concentration, and the ability to react is required (*driving, work/school, sport*)
 - during pregnancy
 - if accompanied by the use of medication
 - if there are previous medical conditions

Recommendation

If one or more of these criteria apply, it is important to look very carefully at one's drinking habits and change them as appropriate. Other forms of support are available if required (*doctors, information centres, self-help groups...*)

There is no such thing as a risk-free consumption of legal and illegal drugs!

When consuming any legal and illegal drug, the subjectively perceived effects depend on various factors (*how consumed, dose, age, gender, environment, mood as well as experience and expectation*).

Consumption of any drug can result in addiction.

The consumption of legal and illegal drugs is to be discouraged:

- In adolescence (*physical and mental development*)
- When driving and during other activities requiring a “clear head” (*e.g. sport, when operating machinery...*)
- In the workplace / in school
- During pregnancy and breastfeeding
- If there are previous medical conditions

Particular care is also required:

- If the quality of the product is unknown and cannot be checked
- In the event of combined use, e.g. alcohol and other drugs
- When medication is taken at the same time

If you notice that a person is not well after having consumed legal or illegal drugs, act responsibly and look after that person. If in doubt, phone the emergency number and administer first aid.



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**Tem perguntas sobre a
dependência, as drogas e as
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***Questions about addiction,
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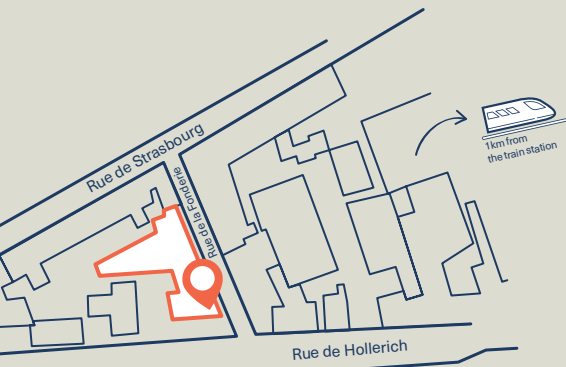
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Fro No

 **T. 49 77 77-55**
frono@cnapa.lu | www.cnapa.lu



CNAPA

**Centre National
de Prévention des Addictions**

INFORMÉIEREN · SENSIBILISÉIEREN · FORMÉIEREN · KOORDINÉIEREN

8-10, rue de la Fonderie L-1531 Luxembourg

T + 352 49 77 77-1 | www.cnapa.lu | info@cnapa.lu

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Informações sobre a prevenção da toxicodependência e propostas de ajuda

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<http://bib.cnapa.lu/public/index.php>

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