



Women and Alcohol

Desperate Housewives - Executive Women – Young, Free and Single

Alcohol is increasingly playing an important part in the lives of women. The days when the women stayed at home while the men went out for a 'boys night out' are now history. Today women are just as likely to have a night out with the girls or open a bottle of wine in front of the TV and this increasing use of alcohol is a worrying trend.

Whether you are a housewife left at home drinking through boredom while your husband is on the golf course, an Executive Women drinking to cope with a stressful environment, young free and single enjoying the nightlife or just fond of a few drinks on a regular basis, there is a lot you need to know about alcohol and how it can affect you as a women.

In this era of equal opportunity it is important that we recognise that there remain differences between men and women. None more so than with the use of alcohol. It is sad to see on our TV news or to read in our newspaper instances of young women binge drinking, tales of women 'drinking the men under the table' and women trying to equal the men when it comes to alcohol. More positive reading is the increasing number of women taking senior roles in industry, commerce and government. But with this comes more pressure, more stress and in some cases the perceived need to be seen to be at least equal to and in some case better than their male counterparts. The pressure that this can generate can lead to increasing levels of stress and the increase use of alcohol and drugs, in order to cope. We all know of stories of grandma who could drink all the men under the table and lived to the age of 99 but the real fact is alcohol affects women more than men. They get intoxicated quicker, appear drunk and remain drunk longer. Why? There are three main reasons why this is so:

- The first is connected to body weight. Women tend to weigh less than men. This is an undisputed fact. Alcohol tends to be diluted by water in the body and because they weigh less there is less water in the female body to dilute the alcohol;
- The second reason lies with body fat. Women have more body fat than men. This is also an undisputed fact. Alcohol is absorbed by body fat and therefore women absorb more alcohol, less is lost through other channels;
- And finally alcohol is broken down and removed by enzymes in the liver. Women produce fewer of these enzymes contributing to a greater risk of physical consequences from excessive use of alcohol.

Alcohol is relatively safe to use in moderation for most people. It permeates all aspects of our society and there is nothing wrong in enjoying a glass of your favourite tippie in the convivial company of a few close friends, over dinner with friends and family or even to celebrate an anniversary or a the clinching

of a business deal. But outside of these tight parameters the use of alcohol becomes inappropriate. It is particularly inappropriate to drink alone, to change the way you feel or to unwind or to help you sleep. Alcohol's addictive qualities will begin to take control and that innocent drink will soon lead to two or three and then more.

It is widely recognised that, on average, women can safely drink up to 3 units of alcohol a day for 5 days of the week with 2 days totally free of alcohol. A recent change to daily rather than weekly units recognises the importance of avoiding binge drinking – days of abstinence with one 'heavy' night out a week is an extremely dangerous drinking pattern. It is also important to recognise the need for at least two days completely clear of alcohol in order to allow the liver to 'recover'. The liver is a robust organ but does have other functions and needs to rest if it has been overworked.

But how much is a unit of alcohol? It is dangerous to associate 1 unit of alcohol as being the equivalent to a glass of wine or a half pint of beer. This over simplification no longer holds water with the differences in strength between different brands of wine, beer and spirits. Glass sizes too have a tendency to vary greatly between home and the bar. A fairly accurate guide is one litre of the alcoholic beverage is equal in units to the percentage alcohol of the drink. One litre of beer of 4.6% alcohol is 4.6 units; one litre of Gin at 40% alcohol is 40 units. Be aware of the strength of wine. A bottle of Portuguese Vino Verde can be as low as 9% alcohol by volume whereas a full bodied French red as high as 14%. That's a difference between 9 units in a litre bottle and 14 units. Nobody expects you to take your calculator with you in order to work out the number of units when you go out drinking and it may therefore be wise to set yourself the limit of just of a couple of drinks. In reality this is probably the limit to what is safe. After a couple of drinks there is the danger of struggling to turn down one for the road, and then another one, and another ...

Be aware drinks poured at home or in the homes of friends and family are almost inevitably larger than those in bars and restaurants.

Although alcohol is not a particularly addictive drug, over time physical and/or psychological dependency can creep in. You cannot live without it and your consumption rises to a degree in which it interferes with your life. There may be withdrawal symptoms and you may wake up in the morning with the sweats and/or shakes. An early drink revitalises you and you get on with your day. You have become dependent on alcohol and to continue is inviting a premature death. A simple questionnaire you can complete which gives you an indication of where you are with your drinking is [**CAGE**](#).

Alcohol dependency is a disease. It has an identifiable cause and symptoms and is progressive and chronic if left untreated. It leads to a premature death and is the third highest killer in the UK behind heart disease and cancer.

The above article has been written by the [**Clinical Team**](#) at [**Nova Vida Recovery Centre**](#). If you, or someone you know is struggling to control alcohol or drugs call [**Sally**](#) now on +351 919 357 186. All calls are treated confidentially. Your anonymity is assured.