



## Desperate Housewives - Executive Women – Young, Free and Single Women and Alcohol

The summer holidays are over, the tourists have returned and the family who descended on you in their droves over August have left you to resume some sort of normality to life on the Algarve. Inevitably, for many of us who live here, alcohol plays an important and for some an increasing role in our lives. Whether you are a housewife left at home while your husband is on the gold course drinking through boredom, an Executive Women drinking to cope with a stressful environment, young free and single enjoying the extensive Algarvian 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 tittle 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.

It is widely recognised that Women can safely drink 21 units of alcohol a week. That is 3 units a day although ideally two days alcohol free a week is the ideal. It is dangerous to associate 1 unit of alcohol as being the equivalent to a glass of wine or a half pint of beer. Both wine and beer vary so greatly in strength and glass sizes too have a tendency to vary greatly between home and the bar. It is easy to calculate how much you can drink by using the simple formulae: the volume of alcohol in % of the alcoholic beverage is equivalent to the number of units of alcohol in 1 litre of that beverage. For example 1 litre of Whisky with strength of 40% is 40 units of alcohol; 1 litre of wine with strength of 13% is 13 units and 1 litre of beer with strength of 5% is 5 units. Women can approximately drink 2 normal size (0.7 litres) bottles of wine a week, spread evenly over the week with 2 days off. Looking at this way it doesn't sound too bad. If you saying that's not much I would respectfully suggest you have a closer look at your drinking.

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. Ask yourself the following questions:

Have you ever felt you should Cut down on your drinking?

Have people Annoyed you by criticising your drinking?

Have you ever felt bad or Guilty about your drinking?

Have you ever had an 'Eye opener' – a drink first thing in the morning to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

If you answer 'Yes' to two or more questions, you may be experiencing problems with drinking too much alcohol and you should seek professional help from your Doctor or a qualified addictions therapist. 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.