

Irish Heart Foundation

Fact Sheet on Alcohol

Alcohol and heart disease:

- Moderate drinkers of alcohol have a lower risk of heart disease compared with abstainers or those with high alcohol consumption¹
- Reduced risk is seen with consumption of one or two drinks per day¹.
- However, high alcohol intake is an important risk factor for raised blood pressure in addition to raised triglycerides and body weight¹.

Irish Consumption patterns:

- 83% of men and 74% of women reported drinking alcohol within the last month²
- The numbers drinking more than 6 drinks on an average session has increased since 1998 from 34.7% to 41.4% for men and from 11.6% to 16.2% for women².
- Younger adults are more likely to consume alcohol and in larger quantities than older adults³
- 36% of men and 20% of women reported consuming greater quantities than the recommended maximum weekly intake³.

Recommendations:

- Try not to exceed the recommended upper limits of 21 standard drinks a week for men and 14 standard drinks a week for women.
- A standard drink is:
 - One half pint of beer, stout or lager
 - One small glass of wine
 - One glass of spirits (gin, vodka, whiskey)
- If you do drink, spread your drinking over the week.
- Keep some days alcohol-free.
- Enjoy alcohol with meals where possible. Have something to eat before you go out. Even a quick snack is better than having a completely empty stomach.
- Try to alternate alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Other tips are:

- If you're watching your weight, try diet drinks, water or white wine spritzers.
- There is not enough evidence to recommend that those who don't drink alcohol should start drinking for health
- If pregnant, you should avoid drinking alcohol as it can cause the baby serious harm, including birth defects.

References:

1. Department of Health and Children (1996) Building Healthier Hearts. The Report of the Cardiovascular Health Strategy Group. Government Publications Office. Dublin.
2. National Nutrition Surveillance Centre (2003) Annual Report: Dietary Habits of the Irish Population. Results from SLAN. Government Publications Office. Dublin.
3. Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance (2001) North/South Ireland Food Consumption Survey.