

## At-Risk Drinking: Introduction

It's not always easy to see when your drinking has crossed the line from moderate or social use to problem drinking. If you drink alcohol to cope with problems or to avoid feeling bad, you may have a problem with alcohol. Alcoholism and alcohol abuse can sneak up on you. It's important to know the warning signs. If you have warning signs, take steps to cut back. Understanding the problem is the first step to overcoming it.

### What is a Standard Drink?

A standard drink is equal to:

- 12-ounces of beer (5% alcohol content).
- 8-ounces of malt liquor (7% alcohol content).
- 5-ounces of wine (12% alcohol content).
- 1.5-ounces or a "shot" of 80-proof (40% alcohol content) distilled spirits or liquor (for example, gin, rum, vodka, whiskey).



### What is At-Risk Drinking?

At-risk drinking is also known as heavy drinking. It is drinking more than a certain number of drinks in a day or in a week:

**Men:** more than four drinks on any day or more than 14 drinks in one week.

**Women:** more than three drinks on any day or more than seven drinks in one week.

**Why are the limits for men and women different?** Women usually weigh less than men. Alcohol goes into body water. Women have less body water than men. After drinking the same amount of alcohol, the concentration of alcohol in a woman's blood is higher.

### Signs of At-Risk Drinking

Drinking is a problem if it causes trouble in your relationships, in school, in social activities or in how you think and feel. You may have a problem with alcohol if you:

- Feel guilty or ashamed about your drinking.
- Lie to others or hide your drinking habits.
- Have friends or family members who are worried about your drinking.
- Need to drink in order to relax or feel better.
- "Black out" or forget what you did while you were drinking.
- Regularly drink more than you intended to.

There is a difference between alcohol abuse and alcoholism (also called alcohol dependence). Unlike alcoholics, alcohol abusers have some ability to set limits on their drinking. However, their alcohol use is still self-destructive and dangerous to themselves or others.