

Decisions about drinking

Many social situations involve the use of alcohol. When used appropriately and in the right setting, alcohol may enhance the enjoyment of an occasion. However, it is by no means an essential requirement for having fun. There are many reasons why a person may choose not to drink:

- They may be underage.
- They may be required to operate a motor vehicle, such as an automobile, motorcycle, boat, all-terrain vehicle, bicycle or other equipment.
- They may be taking certain medications, like sedatives or pain killers.
- They may have certain health concerns, like high blood pressure or liver disease.
- They may suffer from some forms of mental illness (alcohol may enhance depression and should never be combined with medications used to treat this condition).
- They may feel that they are likely to abuse alcohol, because of a personal or family history of drinking problems.
- They may have religious or spiritual reasons to abstain.
- A woman who chooses not to drink may be pregnant, trying to conceive or breastfeeding.

You don't have to drink. And even if you do choose to drink, it doesn't mean you have to do so on every occasion. Here are some things to think about when you are making your choice.

If you choose not to drink:

- Know your own reasons and don't feel you have to apologize for them.
- Expect others to respect your decision.
- Respect the decisions of your friends and others who do choose to drink.

If you choose to drink:

- Consider each situation. Ask yourself some questions. Will you have to drive? Will you have to get up early the next day? Can you afford it? Are you pregnant, breastfeeding or trying to conceive?
- Remember that the effects of alcohol vary from occasion to occasion. Are you taking any medications or other drugs? Have you eaten recently? Are you tired or angry?

- Remember that it's not always necessary to serve alcohol when you're the host. There are many non-alcoholic alternatives. If you're inviting someone who is recovering from a dependency on alcohol, remember that serving no alcohol can help them stay in recovery.
- Keep in mind that alcohol use during the typical workday can cause problems. It can affect your ability to concentrate, make you feel drowsy, and make operation of machinery unsafe.
- Know your limit. Overdrinking can be unsafe and unhealthy.
- Avoid playing sports. Drinking impairs your judgment and reflexes. You will be more likely to injure yourself or others.

Whether or not you choose to drink:

- Be a positive role model. Take responsibility for your actions.
- Tactfully let other people know when their drinking behaviour is inappropriate.
- Try talking to the person whose drinking concerns you. Be careful not to condemn or judge them.

Remember that all standard drinks have the same amount of alcohol. A standard drink is defined as:

- one 341-ml (12-oz) bottle of beer (5% alcohol)
- one 142-ml (5-oz) glass of table wine (12% alcohol)
- one 43-ml (1 1/2-oz) shot of liquor (40% alcohol)

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.