

[drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie)

# Alcohol, sport & you



**drinkaware.ie** was developed by MEAS  
(Mature Enjoyment of Alcohol in Society Limited)  
Merrion House, 1-3 Fitzwilliam Street Lower, Dublin 2.  
Contact: 01 6114811 or [info@drinkaware.ie](mailto:info@drinkaware.ie)

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# Alcohol, sport & you

Having a drink is a big part of Irish culture and social life. So is sport and exercise. For most adults, enjoying alcohol in moderation as part of a healthy lifestyle shouldn't cause any problems.

If you're into sport and fitness at any level, this guide gives you the essential info on how and why alcohol affects your body and impacts on your performance – whether training seriously, toning up or having a kick around the park.

# Be first to the ball

You feel more relaxed when you drink because alcohol slows down the nerves that pass messages around the body. Although alcohol is absorbed quickly into your bloodstream, its effects take longer to wear off so that relaxed feeling can continue well after you've finished drinking. The result is your reactions, coordination, accuracy and balance will be below par if your body has not had time to process all the alcohol in your system.



# Hit the water bottle

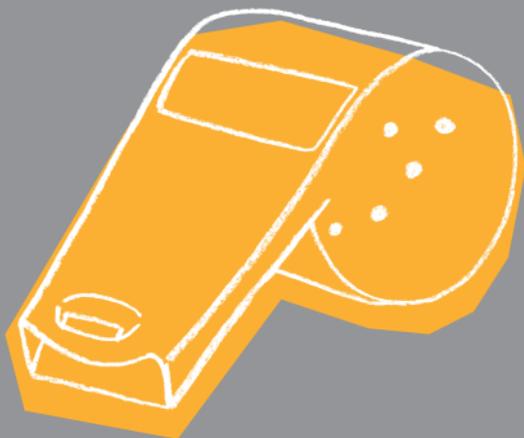
Exercise dehydrates you: beat the thirst with water, not alcohol which will only dehydrate you even more. This is because it blocks the release of anti-diuretic hormones forcing your kidneys to get rid of too much water.

The only way to win is to drink plenty of water before drinking any alcohol, have some more water when you're going to sleep, and put some beside your bed too.



# Fading before the final whistle?

The blood sugar your body needs for energy is produced by the liver releasing glucose into the bloodstream. But exercising muscle cannot use alcohol as an energy source – in fact alcohol reduces your body's ability to produce this sugar, so you have less energy and less endurance capacity. Your body will become tired as it works to expel the alcohol, making it even more of a struggle to keep up the pace.





## Running hot and cold

Alcohol affects your body's ability to regulate temperature. When playing or training, first the alcohol in your system will make you feel feverish, and then you will lose body heat too fast, leading possibly to hypothermia in extreme cases. The longer you play or train, or the colder the weather, the greater the risk.

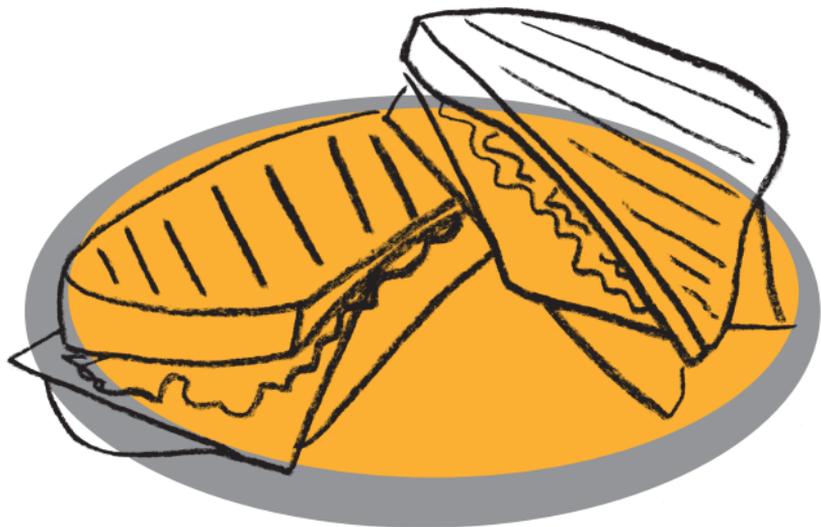
# Don't cramp your style

During exercise, your muscles burn sugar producing lactic acid. Too much lactic acid leads to muscle fatigue and cramps.

Consuming alcohol 24 hours before exercising dramatically increases the risk of you cramping up as alcohol lowers your body's water and salt levels, another cause of developing cramps.

# Feeling thirsty? Eat!

After you exercise or play sport - and definitely before drinking alcohol - eat a meal or snack to replenish carbohydrate, fluid and protein. Food will help your body recover from the work out and help prevent alcohol going straight to your head.





# Stay fit all season

The most common sports injuries are soft tissue ones like sprains, bruises and cuts. Alcohol increases the bleeding and swelling around such injuries taking you longer to recover. It also masks pain, so your injury could be worse than you realise. A delay getting treatment can make all the difference to a speedy recovery. If you've been injured, avoid drinking any alcohol until you've had treatment.

# Remember the rules of the game

- Avoid alcohol 24 hours before playing or training
- Drink lots of water
- If you've been injured, don't drink alcohol until you've had treatment
- Eat before you drink



# One standard drink

A glass of stout/lager/cider (284ml)

Or a small glass of wine (100ml)

Or a pub measure of spirit (35.5ml)

# Don't get caught offside

The Department of Health and Children advises that low risk weekly limits are up to 14 standard drinks for women and up to 21 standard drinks for men. These should be spread out over the week and not saved for one session or big night out.

Basically, this amounts to a daily low risk limit of 2-3 standard drinks for women and 3-4 standard drinks for men, with some alcohol free days over the course of the week. Excessive drinking of alcohol beyond these limits increases the risk of health problems such as coronary heart disease, strokes, liver disease and stomach disorders, undoing the positive benefits of being fit and eating healthily.

# “I can drink more without getting drunk because I am fitter”

Contrary to what some people believe, having good fitness levels does not mean you are less affected by any alcohol you drink.

Alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream through the stomach walls and the intestines. However the exact time that the body takes to absorb alcohol varies from one person to another. Your body's ability to then process that alcohol also varies from person to person and can depend on things like your age, weight and gender – but not fitness.

On average, your body gets rid of alcohol at roughly one standard drink per hour.

# “Tomorrow morning I can work off my hangover by sweating it out of my body”

Mild exercise can help ease the morning after effects by gently increasing your blood circulation which will flush the lactic acid from the muscles. But don't overdo it – more intense training will have the opposite effect, causing you to overproduce lactic acid and feel worse.

However, whether hanging on the sofa or pounding away on a treadmill, the alcohol in your body is broken down by the body at the same average rate of about one standard drink per hour. Nothing can speed up this process – not even energy drinks, coffee, cold showers or fresh air (although they might make you feel better).

So while it is true that some of the alcohol in your system is excreted through your sweat as well as your breath, it will not make you sober, only smelly.

# “It doesn’t matter how much I drink because I have a healthy diet”

Alcohol is not an essential component of an athlete’s diet. It is relatively poor in nutrients and high in calories – a pint of beer or cider contains about the same number of calories as a bar of chocolate. And because alcohol stimulates your appetite while reducing your self-control, you’re more likely to binge eat if you binge drink.

However drinking in moderation by keeping within the recommended guidelines will ensure that any alcohol you do drink isn’t at odds with your healthy eating habits.

Indeed many experts now agree that moderate drinking – one or two standard drinks a day – could have positive health benefits for men over 40 and post-menopausal women. It is not recommended that anyone should start drinking for health reasons.

# “We usually head to the 19th hole after a game”

Of course many people enjoy a drink when they are socialising as alcohol can help you relax.

There are many good health, family and social reasons why you may decide not to drink. If you choose not to drink alcohol either as a lifestyle choice or on any particular occasion, people should support you in this and you shouldn't feel pressured to drink by your team mates.

When socialising in the company of children and teenagers, those who are sports coaches or mentors, and therefore key role models for under 18s, should be aware of the example they are setting for any young sports people in terms of their own alcohol use.

And if you are driving home after the 19th hole, our best advice is don't have one drink at all, let alone one for the road. Why not get to know your team mates better by sharing lifts and taking it in turns to be the designated driver?



## Get in shape

Want next-day advice?

Tips on getting home safely?

How to deal with drinking on holidays?

Get the know-how to know when at

[drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie)

## Ready for a work out?

At [drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie) you can work out how many standard drinks are in your usual tittle with our online standard drinks calculator. Or call us on **01 6114811** and we'll send you a handheld calculator.

# Take our challenge

Do the 'Check Your Drinking' test on [drinkaware.ie](https://drinkaware.ie) to find out if you should cut down or seek help.

## Stay on track

The [drinkaware.ie](https://drinkaware.ie) online drinks diary is a useful tool for sports people who want to keep track of their drinking. Based on your personalised entries, it gives a running total of the number of standard drinks you have consumed in any given week. You can also make a note on any diary entry for an occasion or reminder, for example 'Training tomorrow'.

