



Adult Risky Drinking Screening Guide



Low-Risk Drinking and Standard Drinks

Alcohol may be BC's favourite drug, but widespread excessive use poses major challenges to public health and well-being. While most people in the province consume alcoholic beverages in moderate amounts most of the time, over 40% of residents at least occasionally drink at levels that expose themselves and others to increased risk of harm.

People who drink alcohol can use CARBC's Alcohol Reality Check to see what level of risk is associated with their consumption. In just three questions, this Checkup elicits a short self-report of a person's practice in the past week. If that week is indeed typical, the report provides an adequate basis for a simple risk assessment of their drinking pattern.

Amounts of alcohol consumed and risk thresholds are both quantified in numbers of standard drinks. A standard drink (SD) is a fixed measure of actual alcohol and facilitates a consistent estimate of one's intake across beverage servings of different sizes and concentrations. One SD is equivalent to each of the following:



Beer

350 ml (12 oz)
at 5% alc.



Wine

150 ml (5 oz)
at 12% alc.



Cocktail/Highball

50 ml (1.5 oz)
at 40% alc.



Sherry/Port

85 ml (3 oz)
at 18% alc.

As Easy as 1-2-3



1. Have the participant complete the front page of the screening form. The participant needs only to record the number of standard drinks he or she consumed in each of the past seven days and answer two other simple questions.
2. Using the Quick Scoring Aid, determine the participant's risk status in three aspects and their overall drinking pattern. Record these results on both the side box of the screening form (retaining it for statistics) and on the take-home card.
3. Discuss the results with the participant and give them both the take-home card and the low-risk drinking guidelines card (see following pages for comment suggestions). Any post-interview notes can go on the back page of the screening form.

Risk to Long-term Health

The likelihood that someone will suffer long-term health consequences as a result of alcohol consumption can be assessed simply from the total number of standard drinks consumed in a typical week.

Level of Risk

Suggestions for comments/questions

Low

Men: ≤ 20 SD

Women: ≤ 10 SD

- Good news/Congratulations! Remaining within this bracket reduces your chance of getting various cancers and other illnesses (e.g., liver disease).
- Continue to monitor your intake; it's best to keep it comfortably within this range.

Increased Risk

Men: 21–30 SD

Women: 11–20 SD

- Your weekly consumption raises your odds of developing serious health problems in the future.
- What do you think you could do to reduce your risk?
- What, if anything, stands in the way of you changing your drinking habits?
- What immediate steps do you think you need to take?
- Who do you have to support you in lowering your weekly intake?
- You can make it happen!

High Risk

Men: > 30 SD

Women: > 20 SD

- Your weekly consumption puts you at substantial risk of serious health problems in the future. Risk rises rapidly at these levels.
- [Questions as above for those in the risky bracket]
- Don't count yourself out. Like others, you can succeed in cutting back (even if it's hard, takes time, and requires help)!

Risk for Immediate Harm

The risk of suffering immediate or short-term consequences from alcohol is related to an individual's pattern of use. The risk increases with level of use on a given occasion or when alcohol use is combined with various other activities such as driving; using machinery; situations where alertness is required; use of depressant substances, including medications; pregnancy or breastfeeding.

Level of Risk

Suggestions for comments/questions

Low

Men: 0 days >4 SD **and**
0 times alcohol used in
inappropriate context

Women: 0 days >3 SD
and 0 times alcohol used in
inappropriate context

- Excellent result! By not getting drunk and not drinking at the wrong time, you avoid injury and damage to yourself and others!
- People generally don't realize how much harm can come from intoxication (or from drinking in certain situations).
- Keep up the good performance here!

Increased Risk

Men: 1 day 5–7 SD **and/**
or 1 time combining use with
inappropriate context

Women: 1 day 4 SD **and/**
or 1 time combining use with
inappropriate context

- Your pattern of consumption runs a risk of serious injury or damage to yourself or others.
- What might you want to do to decrease this risk?
- What could make it difficult to change?
- What steps would you like to take now?
- You can make a difference here!

High Risk

Men: 2 or more days 5–7 SD
or 1 or more days >7 SD **or**
>1 time combining use with
inappropriate context

Women: 2 or more days 4 SD
or 1 or more days >4 SD **or**
>1 time combining use with
inappropriate context

- This pattern of consumption puts you and others in real jeopardy of serious harm.
- [Questions as above for those in the risky bracket]
- What would be an appropriate strategy for you? How might you get started?
- Who do you think can help you make changes here to your current practice?
- People, yourself included, can turn things around! It will be well worth it!

Risk of Dependence

The risk of developing dependence is indicated by the number of days an individual reserves as alcohol-free, and by the number of days in which the individual finds it difficult to hold back from the next drink.

Level of Risk

Suggestions for comments/questions

Low

1 or more days alcohol-free
and

0 days of difficulty holding
back from the next drink

- An encouraging result here!
- It's a good idea to keep one or two days alcohol-free (and space your drinking out evenly over the remainder of the week).
- No anxiety over stopping after you've had some alcohol is a good sign.
- Some stress in that situation would suggest your system was starting to need more to get the same effects.
- Keep it going to stay in control!

Increased Risk

0 days alcohol-free
and/or

1 or more days of difficulty
holding back from the next
drink

- Either or both of these signals a risk for becoming dependent.
- Inability to stop drinking after consuming some can indicate increased tolerance to alcohol, and also increased reliance on it.
- If you are experiencing more severe symptoms, you need to seek special help.
- What do you think you might be able to do in order to ensure control?
- What, if any, are the biggest obstacles that might stand in your way?
- How do you think you should begin now?
- What kind of support do you have?
- A lot of people have taken charge of their drinking. You can be on top of it too!

Overall Risk Profile

An overall drinking profile reflects a cumulative status combining results on all three risk categories (risk to long-term health, risk of immediate harm, risk for developing dependence).

Overall Pattern

Suggestions for comments

Low Risk

Low risk
in all three categories

- Well done! Keep it going!
- It's a good idea to monitor your drinking on a regular basis to keep a handle on it.
- You can do this using the online check up at www.alcoholreality.ca. The low-risk drinking card also lists other resources.

Increased Risk

Increased Risk
in any one category
(Low risk in the others)

- [Counsel is essentially the same for both risky and hazardous patterns.]
- We've clarified how and where your pattern leaves you—and others—at real risk or considerable risk for significant harm.

High Risk

Increased Risk
in two or all three
categories; **or**
High risk
in one or two categories

- (a) You've indicated some readiness to change your habits to reduce that risk.
I commend you and invite you to consult various resources listed on these cards.
I'd also encourage you to seek support from family and friends and, as needed, from health professionals like a doctor or a substance use counsellor.
- (b) At this point you don't plan to make significant changes. I would encourage you to monitor your intake and keep in mind future steps you might want to take.
These cards list resources you can consult. If you wish later to seek support from a health professional such as a doctor or substance use counsellor, they can help!
Many who have chosen change have had very positive outcomes! Good luck!

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