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Harm Reduction Strategies for Alcohol

Track Consumption

The single most valuable harm reduction strategy for alcohol is to track your consumption. Various apps can assist with this. Tracking your drinks in real-time can help establish a more mindful relationship with alcohol. Setting a goal to “drink less” is often too vague to be effective for those who have issues with alcohol.

Standardized Drinks

Tracking consumption only works if it’s accurate. Counting a mug full of liquor as “one drink” is wildly inaccurate and defeats the purpose of tracking. To be effective, consumption tracking needs to use “standard drink” measurements (see the infographic below for more information).

Moderation

One of the simplest and most effective harm reduction techniques is to moderate your drinking. This means setting a limit before you start drinking, pacing yourself throughout the night, and limiting the amount of alcohol you consume. If you have an Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) where impaired control is a symptom, moderation might be difficult or unfeasible. In that case, abstinence is likely a more effective harm reduction strategy.

Remember, there’s nothing inherently wrong with wanting to enjoy the effects of alcohol (a “buzz”). Setting a goal to achieve a “buzz” may help reorient your drinking behavior, especially in environments where binge drinking is common, such as college settings.

For an up-to-date copy of this document (as I will be editing and improving on an ongoing basis), please reach out to me at the contact info listed on the top of the page.

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Alternate Non-Alcoholic Drinks

Alternating non-alcoholic drinks with alcoholic ones can help slow down your drinking and reduce the overall amount of alcohol you consume. Some people enjoy 0.0% alcohol versions of hard seltzers, which may taste more similar to the alcoholic versions than non-alcoholic beers.

Eat Before and While Drinking

Eating before and while drinking can slow the absorption of alcohol into your bloodstream, reducing the risk of overconsumption and alcohol-related harm.

Avoid Drinking Games

Drinking games often involve consuming alcohol quickly, leading to rapid intoxication and a higher risk of alcohol-related harm. These games make it difficult to track and control your alcohol intake, increasing the likelihood of overconsumption. Drinking games can also create a social environment where peer pressure or subtle peer influence may be present, leading people to drink more than they are comfortable with.

Set Limits

Understanding your personal limits with alcohol can help you avoid overconsumption and reduce the risk of harm. Establishing a firm goal for the maximum number of drinks per day and the maximum number of drinking days per week is a vital component of a robust harm reduction plan.

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Stay Hydrated

Drink water or other non-alcoholic beverages alongside alcoholic ones to stay hydrated. Alcohol can dehydrate your body, so maintaining hydration can help mitigate some of its harmful effects.

Avoid Liquor

Beer is often consumed in standard serving sizes, such as bottles or cans, which can help with portion control. Liquor, however, is typically consumed in shots or mixed into cocktails, making it easier to lose track of the amount consumed and potentially exceed your intended limits. Mixing liquor with sugary or caffeinated beverages can also mask the effects of alcohol, leading to excessive consumption.

Seek Support

If you struggle to moderate your drinking or are experiencing harm as a result of your drinking, seeking support from a healthcare professional or support group can help you make positive changes and reduce the risk of future harm.

Use Measuring Tools

When pouring drinks at home, use measuring tools like shot glasses to accurately measure the amount of alcohol you're consuming. While it's often better to avoid liquor entirely, if you do drink liquor, it's vital to measure it accurately.

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Don't Stockpile

Avoid stockpiling large amounts of alcohol. Consider deleting alcohol delivery service accounts if having them tempts you to drink when you otherwise wouldn't.

Start Later

Starting to drink at 10 p.m., as opposed to 5 p.m., may help some individuals curtail their alcohol use. Sticking to one alcoholic beverage per hour is ideal, and starting later may help reduce overall consumption levels.

Avoid Drinking and Driving

Buzzed driving is drunk driving. Take advantage of public transportation options such as buses, trains, or subways if they are available in your area. Plan your route in advance to ensure a safe journey home. If attending an event or party where alcohol will be served, consider staying overnight at a nearby location, such as a hotel or with a friend. This eliminates the need to drive after drinking. Use smartphone apps or services that provide designated drivers or ridesharing options for a safe and sober ride home. If you find yourself in a situation where you have been drinking and don't have a safe way to get home, take responsibility for your actions. Call a taxi, use a ridesharing service, or reach out to a friend or family member for a ride.

Reach out to a healthcare professional about The Sinclair Method

The Sinclair Method (TSM) is a treatment for AUD that involves the use of the prescription medication naltrexone. The method is named after Dr. John David Sinclair, who developed it based on the principles of pharmacological extinction.

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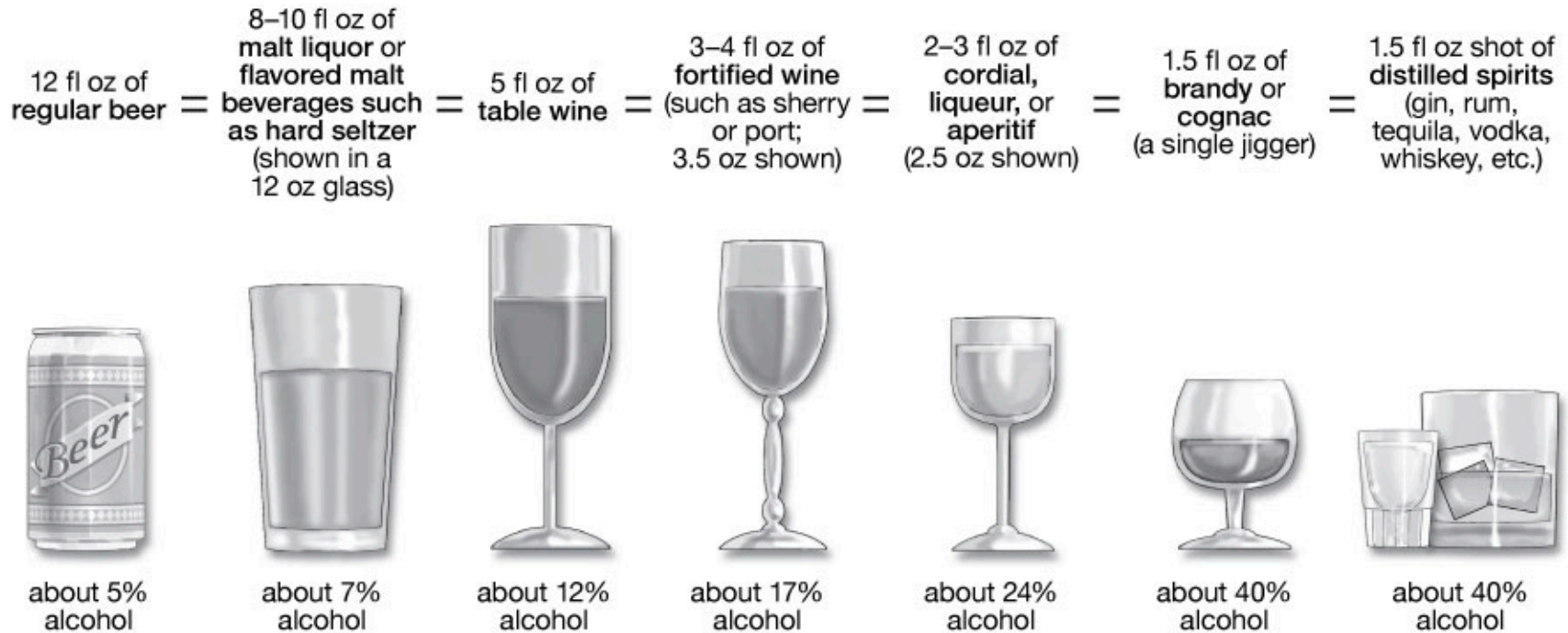
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Important Notes

- **Harm reduction is not simply a label that can be applied to alcohol use to make it inconsequential.**
- The only way to ensure no harm from alcohol use is to abstain entirely.
- If you have abstained from alcohol for a period of time, it's recommended that you exercise great caution and discuss your situation with a variety of people before attempting controlled drinking.
- Do the benefits of drinking again outweigh the risks?
- Impaired control is a hallmark symptom of AUD and/or addiction, so an inability to stick to your harm reduction goals may mean that abstinence is the safer and more straightforward route.



Each drink shown above represents one U.S. standard drink and has an equivalent amount (0.6 fluid ounces) of "pure" ethanol.

