

THE LEGAL LIMIT

The legal limit for drinking and driving is 80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood (80mg/100ml). This is equivalent to 35 micrograms in 100 millilitres of breath.

SO, HOW MUCH CAN I DRINK AND STILL SAFELY DRIVE?

- In terms of driving **safely** the answer is none!
- One drink of alcohol will alter your judgement and reaction time.
- Alcohol is a depressant drug and thus depresses the functions of our brain. Brain functions include risk assessment, co-ordination, reactions and reflexes. All these functions are affected by any alcohol, even small amounts. Obviously the more alcohol we take the more our brain is affected.
- Other related effects after drinking include the brain's ability to process information, messages between the brain and eye becoming slower, and alcohol reducing the ability to see distant objects.
- Risk-taking increases because alcohol creates a sense of over-confidence and depresses our ability to make accurate judgements.

The system of measuring drinks in units was devised almost 20 years ago. Since then we have seen many developments in the strength and variety of alcoholic products. It is no longer accurate to say one glass of wine = 1 unit. This is only true of a glass of wine at 8%ABV in a 125ml glass. A glass of wine at 13% in a 175ml glass = 2.3 units.

DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE IS THE ONLY SAFE ADVICE

HOW MUCH CAN I DRINK AND NOT BE OVER THE LEGAL LIMIT?

Whilst we are clear that ability to drive is affected after one drink we acknowledge that drinking up to a certain limit and driving is legally permitted.

- It's very difficult to convert the legal limit (80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood/35 micrograms in 100 millilitres of breath) into a number of drinks because it's different for each individual.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

There are various issues to consider, such as:

- your body weight
- whether you're male or female (males have more fluid in their body which dilutes the alcohol)
- the strength of the drink
- absorption rate
- roughly speaking an 11 stone man drinking 2 pints of beer, or its equivalent, will normally be over the limit. As little as one pint of very strong lager may take a driver to the limit.

It is important to know the strength of drink(%ABV) and volume/ amount of liquid, to know how many units a drink contains.

Wine at 13%ABV in a 175ml glass = 2.3 units

Here's how to work it out:

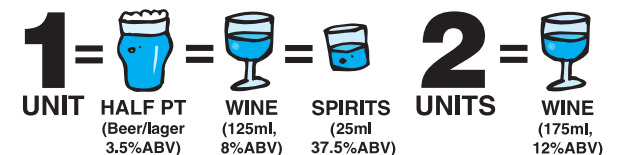
Multiply the volume of drink by %ABV, then divide by 1000. For example: $175 \times 13 = 2,275 \div 1000 = 2.275$ (2.3 units).

WHY ISN'T THE DRINK DRIVE LEVEL ZERO?

- There have been calls recently to lower the legal limit to at least bring it into line with most of Europe, which is 30mg lower than Britain (at 50mg/100ml). This has been unsuccessful even though the Government declared this as an intention.
- European countries who have reduced this limit have seen a decrease in road fatalities.
- It would be very difficult to impose a zero limit because alcohol readings (although relatively slight) can be given by a person after eating certain foods.

THE LEGAL POSITION

- Current legislation is contained in the Road Traffic Act 1991, which introduced a new offence of **causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs**. This offence is punishable by up to 10 years imprisonment, plus an unlimited fine and automatic disqualification.
- Other offences include **driving or attempting to drive when unfit through drink or drugs**, or even **being in charge of a motor vehicle while unfit**.
- These offences, plus **failure to provide a specimen when required**, all carry penalties of automatic disqualification for varying periods, plus, in some cases, the possibility of a prison sentence and the certainty of large fines.



STRANGE BUT TRUE

Leeds, June 1994:

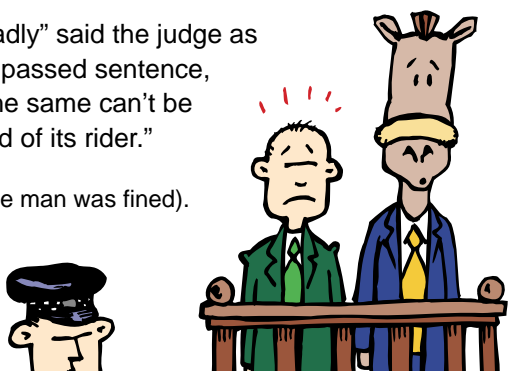
A man was arrested for being more than twice the legal limit... while in charge of a horse!

The arresting officers had noticed the horse and rider "wandering all over the road." When they approached the man they noticed that he seemed the worse for wear - a suspicion that was quickly confirmed when they administered a breathalyser test.

Appearing in court, the man's defence was that he didn't think his condition was important as the horse had "a mind of its own".

"Sadly" said the judge as he passed sentence, "The same can't be said of its rider."

(The man was fined).



PUBLIC EDUCATION

- Social attitudes to drink driving have seen a real change in the last few years. The number of drivers failing a test after an accident has fallen, and driver or rider fatalities when alcohol was involved has also declined. The most marked decline is among young people, who seem to be getting the message.

KEEPING YOURSELF AND OTHERS SAFE

- Be a drink-free driver yourself, for everyone's sake.
- Arrange to take turns at being a nominated driver who doesn't drink and who drives everyone else home.
- Use free or subsidised public transport available for drivers, or use taxis.
- Use public transport.
- Don't force alcohol on drivers
- Have alcohol free drinks at home for driving guests.
- Never accept a ride home from a driver who's been drinking.
- Arrange transport or somewhere to sleep for drink-impaired drivers.
- Remember that accidents happen on short journeys too. Don't be tempted to think 'it's only around the corner, it'll be okay to drive'.

If you're concerned about your own or someone else's drinking, contact **Alcohol Focus Scotland** for further information or information on the alcohol advice agency nearest to you.

Alcohol Focus Scotland gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from The Scottish Executive.



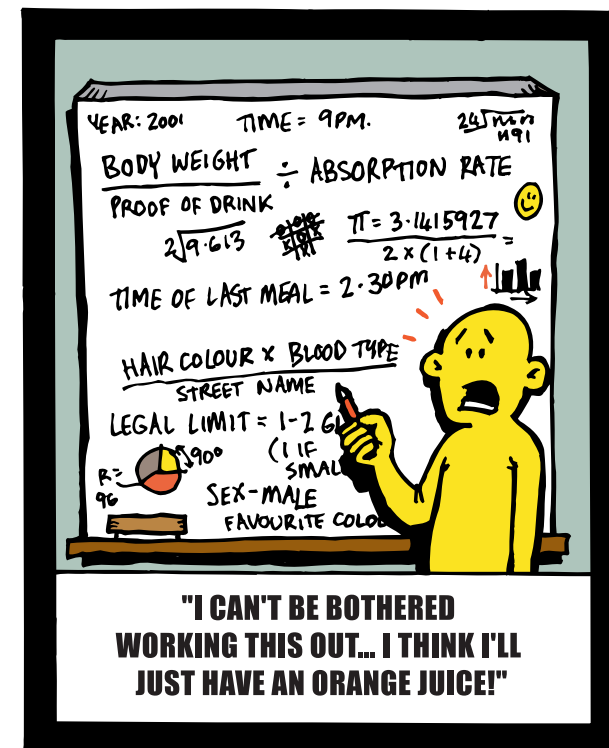
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Drink and the driver



healthy living



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