

# Healthy Living



## What is a healthy lifestyle?



World Health Organization  
Regional Office for Europe  
Copenhagen

Nutrition Policy, Infant Feeding and Food Security

**EUROPEAN HEALTH21 TARGET 11****HEALTHIER LIVING**

By the year 2015, people across society should have adopted healthier patterns of living

*(Adopted by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe at its forty-eighth session, Copenhagen, September 1998)*

**Abstract**

A healthy lifestyle is a way of living that lowers the risk of being seriously ill or dying early. Not all diseases are preventable, but a large proportion of deaths, particularly those from coronary heart disease and lung cancer, can be avoided. Scientific studies have identified certain types of behaviour that contribute to the development of noncommunicable diseases and early death. Health is not just about avoiding disease. It is also about physical, mental and social wellbeing. When a healthy lifestyle is adopted, a more positive role model is provided for other people in the family, particularly children. This booklet aims to help readers change their behaviour and improve their health in order to live healthier, longer lives.

**Keywords**

LIFE STYLE  
HEALTH BEHAVIOR  
CHRONIC DISEASE – prevention and control  
NUTRITION

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*This document was text processed in Health Documentation Services  
WHO Regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen*

## HEALTHY LIVING

### 1. What is a HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

A way of living that **LOWERS THE RISK** of being seriously ill or dying early. Not all illness and disease is preventable; however a large proportion of deaths, particularly those from coronary heart disease and lung cancer, can be avoided. Scientific studies have identified certain types of behaviour that contribute to serious illness and early death. This booklet aims at helping you to change your behaviour and **IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH** so that you and your family live healthier, longer lives.

### 2. What is a HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

A way of living that **HELPS YOU ENJOY** more aspects of your life. Health is not just about avoiding a disease or illness. It is about physical, mental and social well-being too. This booklet aims at helping you decide to make healthier choices in your lifestyle which will give you more opportunity to **ENJOY MORE ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE FOR LONGER**.

### 3. What is a HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?

A way of living that **HELPS YOUR WHOLE FAMILY**. When you adopt a healthy lifestyle you provide a more positive role model for other people in your family, particularly children. You will also create a better environment for them to grow up in. By helping them to follow a healthier lifestyle you will be contributing to their wellbeing and enjoyment of life now and in the future.

## TOBACCO

Smoking is the greatest single self-imposed risk to health of all.

**RISKS TO YOU:** Respiratory illness, coronary heart disease, cancer

**RISKS TO YOUR FAMILY:** Respiratory illness, chest, nose, ear and throat infections. Your family's risks are increased two to three times if you smoke.

Babies who are exposed to tobacco smoke at home are at increased risk of sudden infant death. Young children who have one or more parents who smoke are twice as likely to suffer with chest problems in their first year of life. They will have more chest, nose, ear and throat infections than children whose parents do not smoke. They are also more likely to take up smoking themselves later in life.

**IF YOU ARE PREGNANT** you can damage your baby's chances of being healthy by smoking even before the baby is born.

**FACT:** Tobacco-related diseases not only lead to many premature deaths but also to years of disease and disability. One half of all people who regularly smoke will be killed by cigarettes, half in middle age and half in their senior years. If you stop smoking before middle age you will avoid almost all the increased risk that would have otherwise occurred. Even stopping smoking in middle age can lower your risk.

If you don't use Tobacco **DON'T START**. If you do use Tobacco you can lower your risk by stopping **NOW**. The health benefits will start **IMMEDIATELY**.

## 5-STEP ACTION PLAN

- **Step 1.** Monitor your current PATTERN of Tobacco use – WHEN do you use Tobacco and WHY?

*“I smoke first thing in the morning: it's part of waking up”*  
*“I use tobacco to help me relax when I get stressed at work”*  
*“I use tobacco when I get angry in the evening”*  
*“I smoke to be sociable – all my friends smoke”*

- **Step 2.** Decide to give up Tobacco NOW – whatever your age it will lower your risk. Is it cool to be addicted? – NO. Choose the day when you are going to stop. If possible choose a day when you won't be under much stress. Make sure you put away any tobacco, ashtrays, matches or lighters. AND STOP.

*“I just did it; I stopped”.*

- **Step 3.** Take notice of special times when you might WANT to smoke and be extra determined. Select ALTERNATIVE things to do when you are tempted to use tobacco.

*“I chew gum instead: it helps me concentrate too”*  
*“I go for a brisk walk when I feel tempted”.*

- **Step 4.** Practise ways of saying “NO” to help you.

*“I've just given up smoking: please don't tempt me”*  
*“No thanks. I don't use tobacco any more”.*

- **Step 5.** Ask your friends to give you SUPPORT. In order to continue being a nonsmoker you need praise from your friends and family that you kicked the habit, that you smell and look better too.

## NICOTINE IS AN ADDICTIVE DRUG



When you stop using Tobacco you may have some WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS such as increased appetite. This will eventually return to normal. Other symptoms might be

disturbed sleep for a while. Some people feel depressed or irritated; others experience light-headedness.

You will need EXTRA SUPPORT from friends and family during this time. In some countries nicotine replacement therapies such as nicotine chewing gum or nicotine patches may be available; these can lessen the withdrawal symptoms.

If you RELAPSE, remember you are human! Learn from your mistakes and TRY AGAIN. It may be some months before you can be confident that you will never want another cigarette. The chances are YOU WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

**What you will achieve:**

You will be LESS at risk from major illnesses.

You will have MORE MONEY to spend on better food and clothes.

You will FEEL MORE HEALTHY, and

You will influence your Family's HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

Here's what some people said after they'd quit using Tobacco:

*"I thought, shall I smoke or shall I be healthy?"*

*"I smelt of spring!"*

*"I was really nervous ... I smoked to manage stress. I thought, I can show them they don't stress me!"*

*"I made sure there was no Tobacco at all in the house so I wouldn't be tempted"*

## **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

Whatever your age Physical Activity plays an important part in your health and wellbeing. Some people think it is only sportsmen and women who need to build Physical Activity into their lives. However EVERYONE needs to keep their bodies working well in order to be healthy.

The three main components of being physically fit are:

### **STAMINA, STRENGTH and SUPPLENESS.**

Physical Activity is necessary to stimulate the body's own natural maintenance and repair system. Your bones, joints and muscles – especially your heart – will actually stay younger if you keep them busy. If you are not Physically Active you increase your Health Risks in many ways.

**RISKS TO YOU:** Coronary heart disease, strokes, high blood pressure, breathlessness, flabby body, little energy, stiff joints, osteoporosis, poor posture, overweight.

**RISKS TO YOUR FAMILY:** Lack of energy for your sexual relationship; lack of energy for your children and grandchildren; a poor role model.

If you are already PHYSICALLY ACTIVE and use some parts of your body in your WORK you may need to find opportunities to use other parts in different ways to maintain a balance between STAMINA, STRENGTH, and SUPPLENESS. If you are developing a MORE WESTERN LIFESTYLE, living in a town, using labour-saving devices, and riding in cars, buses and trams rather than walking, you are MORE AT RISK of

becoming UNFIT. You need to find opportunities to develop STAMINA, STRENGTH and SUPPLENESS.

If you are ALREADY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE continue being so and use more variety of movement.

**STAMINA:** You need a well developed circulation to the heart and lungs to give you the ability to keep going without gasping for breath. With stamina you have a slower, more powerful heartbeat and will be able to cope more easily with prolonged or heavy exercise.

**STRENGTH:** You need well toned muscles to give you the ability to do physical work. When your shoulder, trunk and thigh muscles are toned-up they will work well and you will not experience strains and injuries as often.

**SUPPLENESS:** Developing good mobility in your neck, spine and joints will prevent you spraining ligaments and pulling muscles and tendons. You will also be less likely to experience aches and pains from stiff joints.

One good feature of a Western Lifestyle is that more people are WALKING and CYCLING to work and some are even JOGGING. Providing you build up to jogging gradually it can be good for you. However, if you have access to a pool vigorous SWIMMING can provide STAMINA, STRENGTH and SUPPLENESS to the greatest effect.



Have a look at this chart which analyses some Physical Activities and choose which ones are appropriate to your way of life and your needs:

Activity	Stamina	Strength	Suppleness
Climbing stairs	***	**	*
Cycling (hard)	****	***	**
Dancing (folk/ballroom)	*	*	***
Dancing (disco)	***	*	****
Digging (garden)	***	****	**
Football	***	*****	***
Gymnastics	*	***	****
Housework (moderate)	*	*	**
Jogging	****	**	***
Swimming	****	****	****
Walking briskly	**	*	*
Walking (over hills)	***	**	*

Key: \*No real effect; \*\* Beneficial effect; \*\*\* Very good effect; \*\*\*\*Excellent effect.

#### ACTION PLAN

- If you are not physically active IDENTIFY WHEN you could be more physically active and HOW (e.g. put more physical effort into housework; walk briskly, get off the bus or tram one stop earlier; choose to climb the stairs even if there is a lift, play sports).
- START SLOWLY – DON'T do too much too soon. Listen to your body: if you experience dizziness, nausea, pain and extreme tiredness you are doing too much too soon.
- If you are comfortable with what you are doing increase the amount of exercise and BUILD IT UP GRADUALLY.
- AIM at half an hour of MODERATELY INTENSE Physical Activity FIVE or more days a week.

MODERATELY INTENSE Physical Activity means you should get slightly out of breath. This is healthy. If your muscles are working better so is your heart.

### MORE IS BETTER – EVERY DAY

#### **What you will achieve:**

You will be LESS at risk from major illnesses and minor ailments such as colds.

You will have MORE ENERGY to spend on living.

You will FEEL MORE HEALTHY.

Here's what some people said when they had become MORE Physically Active:

*"I feel better; I sleep better"*

*"As a husband, once I started taking an active part in the housework, my wife and children appreciated me more"*

*"Being more active gives me more energy"*

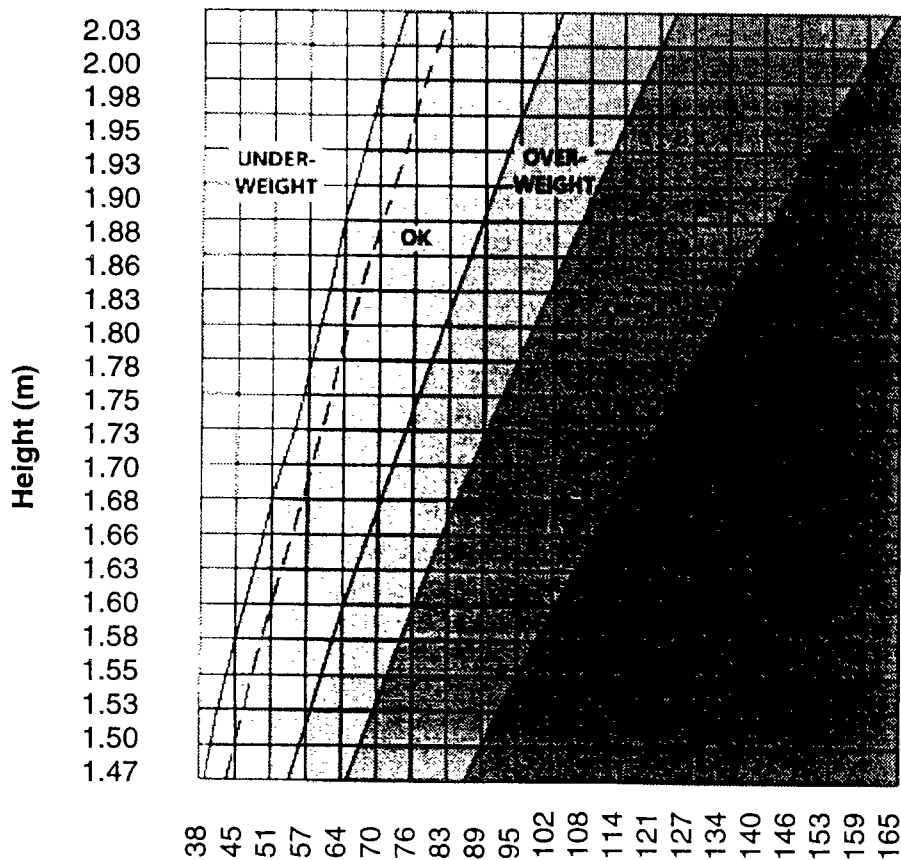
*"My family saw how I benefited very quickly; now they join me for brisk walks"*

There is a direct relationship between your level of physical activity and how much energy you use up from the food you eat. If you eat more than you use the surplus energy is stored as body fat. This means you will become overweight which in itself increases your risk of disease and disability. This risk is increased even more if you also use tobacco and drink more than the recommended number of units of alcohol. Read on to find out about creating a Healthy Lifestyle by making decisions about eating a MORE HEALTHY diet.

## HEALTHY EATING

It is important to enjoy the food you eat. And eating in a healthier way may even be cheaper! Some traditional beliefs of what makes up a healthy diet may be really good, such as eating home-preserved vegetables, but other traditional beliefs are disease-promoting, e.g. eating large quantities of fatty meat daily. Recent evidence has shown that eating too much meat with animal fat is risky to our health. Only very small amounts of lean meat are needed – and not every day. In fact, the less meat and animal fat we eat the better!

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF YOU ARE EATING A HEALTHY DIET?

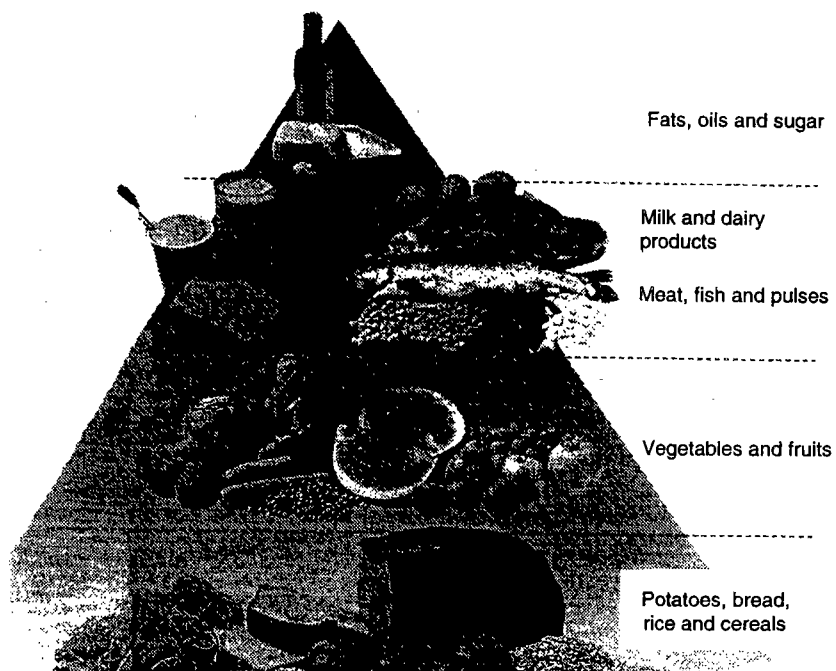


**RISKS FROM BEING OVERWEIGHT:**

**RISKS TO YOU:** Coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, non-insulin dependent diabetes, constipation, joint pain, being out of breath. Your risks multiply if you eat too much animal fat, smoke, drink alcohol and take very little exercise.

**RISKS TO YOUR FAMILY:** Coronary heart disease, development of bad eating habits, poor life expectancy. But having a Healthy Lifestyle isn't only about being the right weight for your height.

Being healthy is also about **WHAT** you eat – choosing the right food.



The most up-to-date research suggests that you can build a healthy and balanced diet by choosing your food as if you are building a Food Pyramid.

### **POTATOES, BREAD, RICE AND CEREALS**

These starchy foods are not fattening unless you cook or serve them with fat. In fact these foods give you energy for all the activities of your daily life. In addition they are a good source of protein, vitamins and minerals as well as starch. They should definitely form the **MAIN** part of most meals, and preferably, every meal. If possible eat whole grain varieties of cereals since these are high in fibre. The additional benefit is that fibre can help to prevent constipation and other bowel disorders. **REMEMBER** potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin C (especially if you do not peel them) and can therefore help to prevent anaemia if eaten together with iron-containing foods. So eat **MORE** Potatoes, Bread, Cereal, Rice **EVERY DAY**.



### **VEGETABLES AND FRUIT**

Vegetables are the main source of minerals and vitamins in our diet. Many of us do not eat enough of either. Some vegetables traditionally grown in your areas may be available all the year round. Try to eat what is in season and add beans and lentils which are excellent sources of minerals. Eat **MORE** **IRON**-containing food such as green vegetables. Locally produced vegetables are usually the cheapest and the most full of flavour and nutrients because they are fresh. Even better is



growing your own vegetables and using them directly from the garden. Fruit is also a good source of minerals and vitamins. Try to eat seasonal fruit and preserve as many of the wild or garden fruits as you can by freezing, canning or drying them. **EAT MORE THAN 5 PORTIONS OF VEGETABLES AND FRUIT EVERY DAY** (more than 400g daily).

### **MEAT, FISH AND PULSES**

Eating too much animal fat is a main cause of ill health. Our bodies need very little but most of us eat too much. You may have heard of **SATURATED FATS**. These are found mainly in the meat of cows, pigs and sheep and in products which include their meat and fat, such as sausages, meat pies and beef burgers. Eating too much saturated fat can lead to coronary heart disease and being overweight.



**UNSATURATED FATS**, however, are found in oily fish, chicken, eggs, turkey, duck, beans and lentils and foods made from these. Unsaturated fat may be better for you, but eating **TOO MUCH FAT** of any type can increase your weight. It is better to buy a small amount of lean meat rather than fatty meat or solid fat. It is even better to **EAT MORE FISH** of all kinds. And don't forget to increase your **IRON** intake by eating liver. Traditional meals using peas, beans and lentils provide good nourishment. Remember to cut down on any animal fat used in cooking, e.g. in soups do not add fat and do not fry food for. Where **FAT** is involved, **LESS IS BEST**.

## MILK AND DAIRY PRODUCE

Milk, cheese and yoghurt are good sources of protein, vitamins and minerals, but they are also **HIGH IN ANIMAL FAT**. To achieve a Healthy Lifestyle it is important to eat **SOME** milk and dairy produce. If semi-skimmed or skimmed milk is available this is **BETTER** for adults as it contains less fat. And, of course, the **BEST MILK** for babies and young toddlers is **BREAST MILK** which contains everything they need for up to six months of age for their healthy start in life and can be continued for up to two years.



## FATS, OILS AND SUGAR

The tip of the Pyramid is the smallest part. This reflects how little you should eat from this food group. **LESS IS BETTER**. If you use any fat or oil in cooking use less. Steaming, boiling and grilling without extra fat or oil helps to cut down your total intake of fat. Reduce the amount of fat in all your recipes. Eat bread without spreading butter on it. Try to cut down on sugar as it causes dental decay, may increase your weight and doesn't give you any micronutrients.



**ACTION PLAN**

- Use the Pyramid to **MONITOR** what you eat.
- Do your traditional recipes give you a healthy diet? If they contain Potatoes, Bread, Rice, Pasta, Vegetables and Fruit, continue to enjoy them.
- Try not to be tempted to switch to imported processed “western” foods. These may be **TOO RICH IN FAT** and sugar will increase many of your health risks.
- If you have the **OPPORTUNITY TO CHOOSE** what you eat, make sure most of your food comes from the Potatoes, Rice, Cereal, Pasta, Vegetables and Fruit.
- If you have very **LITTLE CHOICE** over what you buy vary the method of cooking to avoid eating too much fat (boil, steam or grill foods rather than frying them) and try to introduce fresh locally-produced vegetables and fruit whenever you can.
- Take **LOCAL ADVICE** on minimizing the damage from vegetables contaminated with chemicals and pesticides.
- Grow and eat **MORE** vegetables of all kinds and harvest them when you need them.
- If you eat a lot of foods rich in animal fats and oil try to reduce the quantity and do not add extra fat or oil when cooking vegetables.
- **AVOID ADDING SALT** to your meals at the table – however, when you do use salt in cooking ensure that you buy **IODIZED SALT** which prevents iodine deficiency.



- If you are a **WOMAN** of childbearing age it is vital to try and prevent anaemia which increases the risk of complications during and after childbirth. Do this by eating foods rich in iron (meat, fish and liver) along with foods rich in vitamin C (fresh vegetables) and avoid iron inhibitors (e.g. tea).
- Try to drink tea about two hours after finishing a meal since tea contains phenols which could inhibit the absorption of the **IRON** present in your meal.
- **INFANTS:** The best food is breast-milk which contains everything they need to give them a healthy start in life. Young infants should have nothing (no water, dried milk, sugared water, tea, etc.) except breast-milk for the **FIRST 6 MONTHS** and breastfeeding can continue until 2 years of age.

### **ABOVE ALL, EAT MORE LOCALLY PRODUCED VEGETABLES AND LESS ANIMAL FAT**

#### **What you will achieve:**

You will be **LESS** at risk from major illnesses.

You will give your children a **BETTER START IN LIFE**.

You will all **FEEL AND LOOK MORE HEALTHY**.

Here's what some people said when they ate a **MORE  
BALANCED DIET**

*"I've got interested in cooking food again"*

*"I'm amazed! It seems to be cheaper to eat a healthy diet"*

*"My bowel problems seem to have ceased"*

*"The children look better and don't get ill as often"*

Read on to find out what decisions you can make to create a **Healthy Lifestyle** by cutting down your Alcohol intake.

## ALCOHOL

Drinking small amounts of alcohol can be a pleasant social activity for many people. Indeed drinking small quantities of alcohol can reduce the risk of heart disease for older people if it does not conflict with any medication being taken. However as the amount we drink and the number of times we drink increases, then so do the risks.

**RISKS TO YOU:** Raised blood pressure, which increases the risk of Stroke; stomach disorders; depression and emotional disorders; cancers, particularly of the mouth, throat and gullet; hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver; malnutrition; accidents at home, at work and on the roads; suicide.

**RISKS TO YOUR FAMILY:** Violence, accidents (perhaps influenced by you); less to spend on food; poor role model for children; increased risk of divorce.

**IF YOU ARE PREGNANT OR BREASTFEEDING** you can damage your baby by drinking Alcohol.

If you don't drink Alcohol **DON'T START**. If you do drink Alcohol you can lower your health risks by **CUTTING DOWN** or even **STOPPING NOW**.

## ACTION PLAN

- Monitor your Alcohol drinking PATTERN – WHEN do you drink Alcohol and WHY?

*"I drink vodka at lunch time to be the same as my colleagues"*

*"I pour myself a drink as soon as I come home in the evening so I can forget the stresses of the day".*

- Become AWARE of the consequences of drinking TOO MUCH Alcohol.

*"I lose my temper with my wife over trivial things"*

*"I feel really sexy but I can't perform"*

*"I think I can drive well, but in fact my driving becomes dangerous"*

- Take special notice of times when you have drunk TOO MUCH

*"Lunch-time drinking made me cause an accident at work – I nearly killed someone"*

*"After work is a problem time for me – I come home and provoke a fight for no reason"*

*"I have a tendency to depression – drinking too much makes me even more depressed".*

- Decide to CUT DOWN on Alcohol

*"I won't drink during the day"*

*"I will only have one drink after work"*

*"If I'm at a wedding or a party I will alternate alcohol with non-alcoholic drinks".*

- Ask your friends and family to PRAISE you when you drink less

- Work out ways you can AVOID Alcohol

- Select ALTERNATIVE things to do when you are tempted to use Alcohol

*“At lunch-time I will go for a brisk walk to avoid temptation”  
“I will drink fruit-juice instead”*).

- Practise how to say “NO”! If you RELAPSE remember you are human! Learn from your mistakes and TRY AGAIN. The chances are you WILL BE SUCCESSFUL.

**What you will achieve:**

You will be LESS at risk from major illnesses.

You will be LESS at risk from violence and accidents.

You will FEEL MORE HEALTHY, and

You will influence your Family’s HEALTHY LIFESTYLE.

**How much Alcohol can you drink with LOW RISK?**



The following information is based on UNITS of Alcohol.

One UNIT of Alcohol contains about 10 g of Alcohol and is roughly equivalent to: 1 bottle (250 ml) of ordinary strength beer (4 – 5 % alcohol) 1 glass (100 ml) of wine, 1 SMALL glass of vodka (25 mg of vodka).

**BEWARE:** Drinks often contain TWO or MORE UNITS in a single glass!

If you drink up to two units a day of alcohol free from impurities there is little chance of any risk to your health. If you regularly drink more than two units a day there is an increasing risk to your health. If you drink more than four units in any one day there is an increased risk of injury and accidents as well as an increasing risk to your health.

Here's what some people said when they had cut down on Alcohol:

*"It was difficult: I felt strange for a while but then I noticed I was more alert"*

*"Friends told me I am more fun to be with"*

*"My sexual performance improved"*

*"I discovered we had fewer rows at home"*

*"I felt happier; my mood swings have stopped".*





