

# Physical health problems caused by drinking alcohol

Information for the public

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[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## Physical health problems from alcohol misuse – the care you should expect

Around 1 in 4 people in the UK drink alcohol in a way that could harm their health. Over time, regular heavy drinking can lead to health problems such as liver disease and pancreatitis. Stopping drinking is the best way to avoid getting these health problems or making them worse. But people who are used to drinking heavily can become ill when they first stop and may need treatment for withdrawal symptoms.

We want this guideline to make a difference to people who have health problems from long-term heavy drinking by:

- Making sure you get specialist treatment if you need help to stop drinking safely.
- Helping doctors spot if you have symptoms of health problems caused by regular heavy drinking, such as liver disease or pancreatitis.
- Advising doctors which treatments work best for these health problems.

We updated this guideline in April 2017 to give doctors new information about what they should do before they offer drugs called corticosteroids to people with alcohol-related hepatitis.

## Making decisions together

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

To help you make decisions, think about:

- What matters most to you – what do you want to get out of the treatment?
- What are you most worried about – are there risks or downsides to the treatment that worry you more than others?
- How will the treatment affect your day to day life?
- What happens if you don't want to have treatment?

If you can't understand the information you are given, tell your health professional.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

## Where can I find out more?

[NHS Choices](#) has more information about treatment and support for alcohol misuse.

These organisations can give you more advice and support.

- Adfam, 0203 817 9410 (please note this is not a helpline)  
[adfam.org.uk](http://adfam.org.uk)
- British Liver Trust, 0142 548 1320. Free medical helpline: 0800 652 7330  
[britishlivertrust.org.uk](http://britishlivertrust.org.uk)

We wrote this guideline with people who have been affected by health problems related to alcohol and staff who treat and support them. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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