

DRIVING AND ALCOHOL

Information Fact Sheet



Many of us like a drink when we go out but it's best to leave the car behind and either get a ride with a designated driver, catch a taxi, use public transport, plan to stay over at a friend's or organize to be picked up by someone who has not been drinking. If it's impossible to leave your car behind, make sure you're safe to drive.

WHAT IS THE LEGAL LIMIT FOR DRIVERS?

The legal alcohol limit for Learners and P-plate drivers is ZERO Blood Alcohol Content (BAC).

- All other drivers need to stay under 0.05 BAC. The best advice is not to drink at all before driving.
- It is important to know that after a big night out drinking, even the next day you may still be over the limit to drive.

IS THERE ANY SUCH THING AS A STANDARD DRINK?

The alcohol content of different types of drinks varies. Low alcohol beer differs considerably to spirits or liqueurs. The variety in size of wine glasses now makes it almost impossible to determine a 'standard' drink.

Another factor which makes it difficult to determine a standard drink is the variety of wines and spirits and cocktails available. Cocktails have a particularly high alcohol level. These factors make defining a guide to how much you can drink and safely drive difficult.

A 'standard' drink could be 1 full strength middie of beer; or 1 small glass of wine; or 1 mixed drink.

- A rough guide for men is two (2) standard drinks in the first hour and one (1) drink per hour after.
- A rough guide for women is one (1) standard drink in the 1st hour and one (1) drink per hour after.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO BRING MY BLOOD ALCOHOL CONTENT (BAC) DOWN?

Your Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) will begin to rise as soon as you start drinking and will usually reach its maximum 20-60 minutes after you stop drinking.

There is no quick way to reduce your BAC after you've stopped drinking.

- Remedies such as exercise, drinking coffee, fruit juice or water, taking a cold shower or deep breaths of fresh air won't lower your BAC. Time is the only way to clear alcohol from the blood stream.
- It can take at least one hour for the body to metabolise (process the alcohol) each drink you have - it depends on the alcohol level in each drink. Therefore, make sure enough time has passed before you drive (even the next day).

HOW CAN I REDUCE THE RISK OF EXCEEDING THE LIMIT?

- Start with a non-alcoholic drink.
- Eat before and while you are drinking to slow the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream.
- Avoid salty snacks (eg: pretzels, chips, peanuts) which make you thirsty.
- Make every second or third drink a non-alcoholic beverage.
- Have one drink at a time (don't "top up" your drinks).
- Try low alcohol alternatives - either "light" beers or non-alcoholic cocktails.

CAN I TEST MY OWN BAC?

Many clubs and hotels have machines which test your BAC, and they are a good idea. But make sure you follow the instructions exactly. Only breath testers which meet the Australian Standards give you an accurate BAC reading.

CAN MEDICATION AFFECT MY DRIVING?

Some over-the-counter prescription drugs can have an effect on your ability to drive, especially when combined with alcohol. Ask your doctor or a pharmacist if a medication you are taking will affect your driving.

HOW CAN I GET HOME SAFELY WITHOUT A CAR?

Depending on where you are, your best options will be:

- Catch a taxi.
- Take public transport.
- Use a courtesy bus.
- Catch a lift with a responsible sober friend.
- Stay over-night at a friend's place.

HOW CAN I BE A RESPONSIBLE HOST?

- Provide low-alcohol and soft drinks as an option to alcohol.
- If someone is a designated driver, don't ply them with alcohol.
- Ask guests who have been drinking if they want to stay overnight.
- Try not to force drinks onto your guests. Everyone has their own pace and knows their own limits.
- Don't let really drunk guests walk home, especially at night. Drink-affected pedestrians are killed each year.

For further information please refer to our **Intoxicated Pedestrians fact sheet**.

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