



Further resources for you and your patients

Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol

What do the guidelines recommend?

*For healthy men and women, drinking **no more than two standard drinks on any day** reduces your risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury over a lifetime.*

*Drinking **no more than four standard drinks on a single occasion** reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.*

Maternal alcohol consumption can harm the developing fetus or breastfeeding baby.

*For women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy, or breastfeeding, **not drinking is the safest option**.*

Children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking; for this age group, not drinking alcohol is especially important. For young people aged 15–17 years the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.



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Interactive resources

- Standard drink calculator
<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/games-and-tools/pages/standard-drink-calculator.aspx>
- *Alcohol Risk assessment tool*
<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/games-and-tools/Pages/risk-assessment-tool.aspx>
- The effects of alcohol on your body interactive map
<https://drinkwise.org.au/alcohol-and-your-health/#>
- Alcohol unit and calorie calculator
<https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/understand-your-drinking/unit-calculator>

Online patient support

- Guide to teenagers and alcohol
<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/publicationdocuments/Your-guide-to-dealing-with-teenagers-and-alcohol.pdf>
- Daybreak (an alcohol support app)
<http://www.daybreakprogram.org>
- Yourroom (alcohol information and resources for patients)
<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/a-z-of-drugs/Pages/alcohol.aspx>

Patient support services

- **NSLHD** (Northern Sydney Local Health District)



1300 889 788 (for all drug and alcohol advice)

- **ACON** (community health, inclusion and HIV responses for people of diverse sexualities and genders) <https://www.acon.org.au/what-we-are-here-for/alcohol-drugs/#alcohol-drugs-basics>
- **Odyssey House** (adult counselling services)
1800397739
- **SDECC** (youth counselling services 12-25)
02 9977 0711
- **SUPPS** (Substance Use in Pregnancy and Parenting Services)
0418 617 960 / 0404 005 247 Northern Beaches
0422 004 080 / 0429 941 800 North Shore

GP-specific resources

- Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol (full guidelines 2009)
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-guidelines-reduce-health-risks-drinking-alcohol>
- Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol: Frequently Asked Questions 2009 <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-guidelines-reduce-health-risks-drinking-alcohol> (Click the link, then scroll to the 'Download' section to download the FAQs)
- Alcohol in pregnancy (RACGP gplearning)
<https://gplearning.racgp.org.au/Content/Tempo/201801AlcoholInPregnancy.html>
- Fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)
<https://adf.org.au/insights/fetal-alcohol-spectrum-disorder-fasd/>



Indigenous resources

- What Aboriginal women need to know about alcohol
https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/What-Aboriginal-women-need-to-know-about-alcohol
- What Aboriginal men need to know about alcohol
https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/U_Z/What-Aboriginal-men-need-to-know-about-alcohol

Standard Drinks Guide

Standard drinks guide



A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. Alcoholic drinks often contain more than one standard drink. Labels on alcoholic beverages display the amount of standard drinks and alcohol content (%) each specific drink contains. This guide gives an average alcohol content of a range of alcoholic drinks as provided by the National Health & Medical Research Council. To find the exact alcohol content check the label.



Alcohol: the facts

Adapted from: NSW Ministry of Health, 'Alcohol: the facts', 2014. URL:

<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/publicationdocuments/Alcohol%20the%20facts%20A4%20Fact%20Sheet%20updated%202018.pdf>

ALCOHOL: THE FACTS

WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Alcohol is a drug that acts as a depressant and slows down the brain and nervous system. It is the most widely used drug in Australia.

Drinking a small amount is not harmful for most people, but excessive drinking on any one occasion can cause health, personal and social problems.

ALCOHOL RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from an alcohol related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial Triple Zero (000).

If the person has been mixing drugs and alcohol, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

EFFECTS OF ALCOHOL

The effects of alcohol depend on:

- how much you drink
- how quickly you drink it
- your size and weight
- whether you are male or female
- how good your general health is
- how healthy your liver is
- where you drink
- whether you drink alone
- whether you use alcohol with other drugs including medications
- if there is a family history of alcohol and other drug dependence.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

Alcohol slows down the messages sent between the brain and the rest of the body. This can make you:

- relax, feel good
- do or say things you normally wouldn't
- feel dizzy, have bad balance
- have trouble controlling how you move (bad coordination)
- react slowly
- get angry
- depressed

- vomit
- have blurred vision (not see clearly)
- slur your words (not speak clearly).

Drinking a lot in a short time can cause:

- headaches
- nausea or vomiting
- tiredness
- sensitivity to noise and light
- dry mouth
- diarrhoea
- poor sleep
- trouble concentrating
- shakiness
- drowsiness
- passing out
- blackouts (temporary loss of memory)
- alcohol poisoning
- stopping breathing (rare)
- coma (rare)
- death (rare).

Because alcohol affects judgement, sight and co-ordination drinking often causes accidents – especially falls, car crashes and drowning. Alcohol misuse is a major contributing factor in assaults and other violent crimes.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Drinking a lot of alcohol regularly over time is likely to cause problems for your physical, emotional and social health. Damage to some body organs can be chronic and permanent. It can also affect your long term wellbeing by interfering in your work and study and cost you a lot of money. It may impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children. Problems can include:

- poor diet
- stomach problems
- frequent infections
- skin problems
- liver and brain damage
- diabetes
- damage to reproductive organs
- memory loss/confusion
- heart and blood disorders
- depression
- relationship problems
- work problems
- increased risk of dementia
- increased risk of some cancers
- money, legal troubles
- dependence
- sleep problems.

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

Using alcohol at the same time as any other drug can be dangerous. This includes drinking alcohol while using medicines from the chemist or doctor. One drug can make the negative effects of the other even worse. Alcohol can also stop medicines from working properly.

Mixing alcohol with other drugs that slow down the body (eg sleeping pills, heroin, cannabis, methadone, buprenorphine) can:

- make it harder to think clearly
- make it harder to properly control how you move
- stop your breathing and cause death.

DRINK SPIKING

Drink spiking is when a person deliberately adds more alcohol (eg. double/triple shot) or a drug (eg.GHB, benzodiazepines) to another person's drink without their knowledge – this could make the person become intoxicated unexpectedly. Drinks are spiked for amusement, to facilitate sexual assault, rape or theft.

If your drink has been spiked:

- ask someone you trust to get you to a safe place
- visit a hospital or your doctor ASAP to test for the presence of drugs.

If you feel unwell or suspect that you have been sexually assaulted then call an ambulance or go to the nearest NSW Health Sexual Assault service or Emergency Department.

Drink spiking is serious and illegal. To prevent drink spiking, it may be best to watch your drink, avoid sharing drinks, buy/pour your own drink and don't accept drinks from people you don't know well or trust.

Reducing alcohol-related harm (snapshot)

Alcohol-related health conditions include:

Mental health

- Dependence
- Depression
- Anxiety

Brain

- Cognitive impairment

Cardiovascular

- High blood pressure
- Arrhythmia
- Cardiomyopathy

Liver

- Cirrhosis
- Hepatitis

Cancer

- Mouth
- Throat
- Oesophagus
- Liver
- Colorectal
- Breast



Source: National Health and Medical Research Council. Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2009.⁷

Guidelines and standard drink sizes

National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines 2009

- 1 For healthy men and women, drinking no more than 2 standard drinks on any day reduces the lifetime risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury.
- 2 For healthy men and women, drinking no more than 4 standard drinks on a single occasion reduces the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.
- 3 a. Parents and carers are advised that children under 15 years of age are at the greatest risk of harm from drinking and that for this age group, not drinking alcohol is especially important.
b. For young people aged 15–17 years, the safest option is to delay the initiation of drinking for as long as possible.
- 4 a. For women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, not drinking is the safest option.
b. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking is the safest option.

What is a standard drink?

Beer			Wine		Spirits
Full strength	Mid-strength	Light	Red/White	Sparkling	Shot
4.6% Alc/Vol	3.5% Alc/Vol	2.7% Alc/Vol	12.6% Alc/Vol	12.6% Alc/Vol	40% Alc/Vol
285ml	375ml	425ml	100ml	100ml	30ml
1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

References

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016. Australian Burden of Disease Study: Impact and causes of illness and death in Australia 2011. Australian Burden of Disease Study series no. 3. Cat. No.800 4. Canberra: AIHW.
- 2 World Health Organisation 2015. Alcohol Fact Sheet.
- 3 Cancer Council Australia 2015. Position Statement – Alcohol and Cancer Risk.
- 4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017. National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2016.
- 5 The Royal Australian College of Physicians and the Royal Australian College of Psychiatrists 2016. Alcohol Policy.
- 6 NSW Population Health Survey. Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence, NSW Ministry of Health. Data between 2003 and 2017 are reported.

For more information contact:
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) NSW
on 1800 250 015

Family Drug Support on 1300 368 186

Visit Your Room website at
www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au

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NSW Ministry of Health, Reducing alcohol-related harm snapshot, November 2018.

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Tips for cutting down on alcohol consumption

- Drink slowly, sip, don't gulp
- Place the glass on the table between sips, and finish your glass before you top-up (so you can count drinks more easily).
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones, or water.
- If thirsty, quench thirst with water rather than alcohol
- Offer to be the designated driver when going out.
- Don't buy alcohol in bulk (eg avoid buying cases of wine/beer).
- Avoid ordering alcohol online.
- Have your first drink later than usual and go home earlier.
- Eat while you drink but avoid salty snacks that make you thirsty.
- Decide before you drink the number of drinks and money you will spend on any drinking occasion and limit if you can.
- When out, avoid drinking in rounds.
- Check out the range of low-alcohol and alcohol-free drinks at the bottle shop and keep some at home.

Adapted from WAADA, 1995, NSW Health, 2000

Source: NCETA 2003, *Handbook for GPs and other health professionals* Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

How can you reduce or quit alcohol?

Adapted from “How can you reduce or quit alcohol?”, Australian Government Department of Health, 2019
<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/about-alcohol/how-can-you-reduce-or-quit-alcohol>

See your doctor

It’s a good idea to see your doctor before you reduce or quit alcohol. They can:

- give you medical advice based on your health
- create a withdrawal plan for you to follow
- link you to support services
- keep track of your progress with regular check-ups
- help you to prepare for any [withdrawal symptoms](#)

If you’re a regular or heavy drinker, it can be **dangerous to reduce or quit alcohol on your own**. Your doctor can refer you to [treatment](#) such as detox, medication and counselling to help manage [withdrawal symptoms](#).

It can be hard to talk about your alcohol use, but remember that your doctor is there to help. If you don’t have a doctor you feel you can talk to about your alcohol use, find a support service in our list of [alcohol contacts](#).

Know the benefits

Reducing or quitting alcohol can improve your life in many ways. It can:

- improve your mood and sleep
- increase your energy
- improve your relationships with your loved ones
- help you perform better at work
- lower your risk of long-term health problems such as cancer and heart disease
- save you money

Keeping these benefits in mind can help you to stay motivated.

Work out a plan

Whether you’re aiming to drink less or to quit altogether, it’s a good idea to have a plan.

Some people prefer to quit in one go. Others prefer to slowly reduce their drinking. Everyone is different so work out what works best for you. Remember that your doctor can help you if you’re not sure.

Your plan might be as simple as drinking one less glass each time you go out. If you want to be more detailed, have a think about your:

- goals — why do you want to reduce or quit alcohol?
- triggers — why and when do you drink?
- strategies — how will you reduce or quit alcohol?
- support — who will you turn to for help?

Your goals

Having a clear goal in mind can help you to stay motivated. People reduce or quit alcohol for many reasons, including to be healthier, to save money or to have more energy.

Your triggers

If you're not sure what your triggers are, it can be hard to drink less. To work out why you're drinking, ask yourself:

- where are the places I drink the most?
- what times do I drink the most?
- do I want to drink or do I feel pressured?

Once you know why you drink, you can work out ways to avoid situations where you might be tempted to drink.

Your strategies

Have some strategies in place so you're prepared when you're tempted by alcohol. You'll know what to do if you unexpectedly find yourself at an event where alcohol is being served.

It's a good idea to **avoid your triggers** to help you quit or reduce alcohol. If alcohol features in your social life, you could:

- organise alcohol-free events with your friends instead of going out for a drink
- suggest venues where mocktails are available
- catch up over a coffee instead of at the pub
- socialise more often with friends who don't drink

If you can't avoid your triggers, try to **swap the alcohol for something else**. For example, if you drink before going out to feel less anxious, meet up with a good friend instead. For more ideas, take a look at these Hello Sunday Morning articles:

- [5 steps to breaking your after-work drink habit](#)
- [Is wine part of your self-care ritual?](#)

If you're **at an event where alcohol is being served**, here are some tips to avoid or reduce alcohol:

- say no to drinks — prepare and practice your responses before you head out
- drink something non-alcoholic like a mocktail

- choose low-strength alcohol
- count [standard drinks](#) to keep track
- set a limit for yourself

For more ideas, read [10 tips to cut down on alcohol](#) on the HealthDirect website.

Are you a regular or heavy drinker? Remember, it can be dangerous to reduce or quit alcohol on your own. Your plan should include a visit to the doctor who may refer you to [treatment](#).

Your support

Like many things in life, quitting or reducing alcohol is much easier with support. Tell your friends and family about what you're doing so they can help you. It's even better if you know someone who is trying to do the same thing. You can support each other.

If you don't have friends and family nearby, or if you need more support, you can:

- call the [National Alcohol and Other Drugs Hotline](#)
- find free support online, such as at [Hello Sunday Morning](#) and [counselling online](#)
- have one-on-one web chats with qualified health coaches through the [Daybreak Program](#)
- join support groups in your area, such as [Alcoholics Anonymous](#)
- find a support service in our list of [alcohol contacts](#)

If you're quitting because you're pregnant, try [Pregnant Pause](#). It's designed to help you, your partner and your loved ones go alcohol-free during your pregnancy.

If you need support to help a family member or friend, contact [Al-Anon Family Groups](#) or [Family Drug Support](#).

Staying alcohol-free

Reward yourself

What you're doing isn't easy. Reward yourself every now and then as you continue to reach your targets. You could go out to the movies or treat yourself to your favourite dessert.

Remember your plan

To re-focus, go back to your plan. Remember why you're reducing or quitting alcohol. Be inspired by how your life will improve when you achieve your goals.

Forgive yourself

Don't be hard on yourself if you have one drink too many. Forgive yourself and start fresh the next day.

Adapted from “How can you reduce or quit alcohol?”, Australian Government Department of Health, 2019
<https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/alcohol/about-alcohol/how-can-you-reduce-or-quit-alcohol>

Immediate risks of alcohol use

Alcohol-related harms

In Australia, alcohol is the second leading cause of drug-related death and hospital admissions after tobacco.

Alcohol is associated with a range of harms. Some harms are associated with drinking too much on one occasion (e.g. accidents, injuries, unsafe sex and alcohol poisoning) while other harms are associated with regular drinking (e.g. liver problems, cancer and alcohol dependence).

The major risks associated with alcohol use include immediate problems such as:

- Increased risk of experiencing an **accident or injury**, for example through **road traffic accidents, falls, fires and drowning**. This risk is especially high among young people
- Increased risk of **sexually transmitted infections** (STIs) or unintended pregnancy
- Increased chance of experiencing **violence**, for example getting into fights or being assaulted

Longer-term problems include:

- **Alcohol dependence**
- **Brain damage** and problems with brain development
- **Malnutrition**
- **Cardiovascular (heart) problems**
- **Cancer** – alcohol has been linked to a range of cancers, including **mouth, oesophagus, liver and breast cancers**
- **Liver problems**
- Increased risk of mental health problems such as **anxiety and depression**
- Alcohol use may also increase problems with **diabetes** and **obesity**
- **Alcohol use in pregnancy** can also lead to serious problems such as **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome** in the unborn child



Excerpt from: National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, 'Alcohol', 2016. (Ed: Dr Wendy Swift.) URL: <https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/ndarc/resources/NDA073%20Fact%20Sheet%20Alcohol.pdf>

Alcohol in pregnancy

Adapted from: Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education (FARE), 'Information you might not know about pregnancy and alcohol', 2018. URL: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/information-you-might-not-know-about-pregnancy-and-alcohol.pdf>

If you are pregnant or planning pregnancy, experts advise no amount of alcohol is safe. The National Health and Medical Research Council, Australia's peak body on developing national health advice, recommends that for women who are pregnant, planning pregnancy or breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

This is because no amount of alcohol has been proven as safe. The evidence is clear: alcohol causes birth defects. All alcohol crosses the placenta harming the baby.

If you have consumed alcohol while pregnant and are concerned, or are having trouble stopping drinking, you should talk to your doctor, midwife or obstetrician.

Talking about alcohol

Many women don't know exactly when they become pregnant and many pregnancies are not planned – so it is possible that you might have been drinking alcohol before you were aware of your pregnancy.

Talking about your drinking may seem daunting, but health professionals speak to lots of people about these issues and they want the best for you and your baby.

It is also important to talk to someone if you think you might be struggling with depression, stress or anxiety. Your health professional can refer you to services in your area to support you and your baby to be healthy.

Risks from drinking alcohol in pregnancy

Increased risk of stillbirth, premature birth and low birth weight

Increased risk of miscarriage Increased risk of birth defects

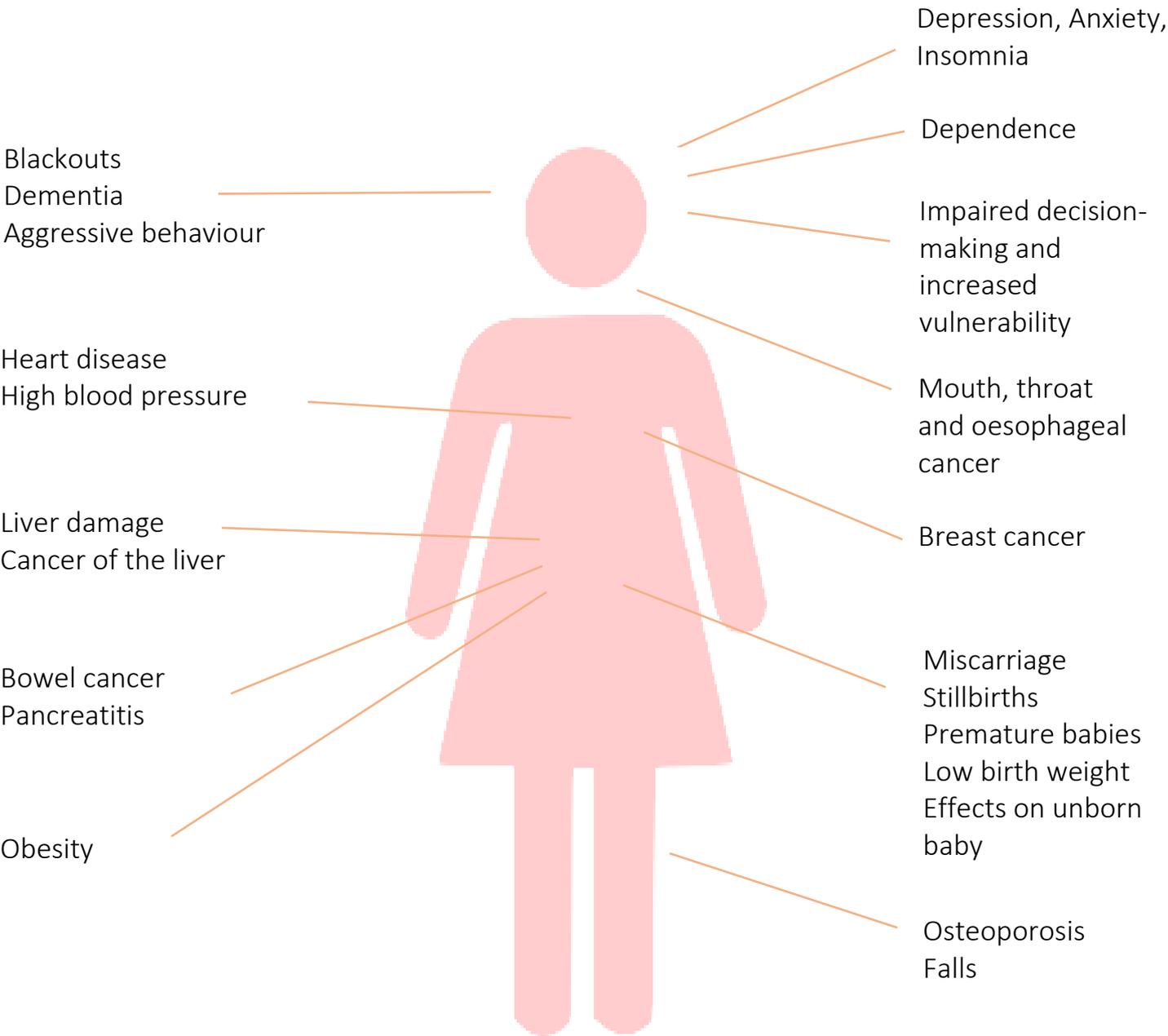
Damage to the baby's brain causing conditions known as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, or FASD

For most children with FASD there are no visible signs but they can have brain damage causing:

- Physical and emotional developmental delay
- Impaired speech and language development
- Learning problems, e.g. poor memory
- Difficulty controlling behaviour

The effects of FASD are lifelong.

Effects of alcohol on women



Effects of alcohol on men

