



Alcohol Reality Check

Adult Screening Guide

As Easy as 1-2-3

The Alcohol Reality Check for adults is easy to take, simple to score, and can facilitate clinician engagement with the individual in regard to risky drinking.

1. Have the participant complete the screening form. The participant needs only to record the number of units of alcohol he or she consumed in each of the past seven days and answer two other simple questions.
2. Determine the participant's risk status in three aspects and their overall drinking pattern (see next page or *Quick Scoring Aid*). Record these results on both the screening form (retaining it for statistics) and on the *Measuring Your Risk* information card.
3. Discuss the results with the participant (see suggestions on following pages) and give them the *Measuring Your Risk* information card. Any post-interview notes can go on the back page of the screening form.



Scoring the Screen

Overall risk is a combination of 3 different elements of risk scored as follows:

1. Risk to long-term health

The score is determined by the total # of units consumed weekly as recorded in response to Question 1.

	MALE	FEMALE
Low Risk	less than 16 units	less than 11 units
Increased Risk	16-30 units	11-20 units
High Risk	more than 30 units	more than 20 units

2. Risk for immediate harms

The score is a combination of

- # of days exceeded risk thresholds (Q. 1) and
- # of times drinking was combined with a listed inappropriate situation (Q. 2)

	MALE	FEMALE
Low Risk	0 days more than 4 units and 0 times inappropriate use	0 days more than 3 units and 0 times inappropriate use
Increased Risk	1 day 5-7 units and/or 1 time inappropriate use	1 day 4 units and/or 1 time inappropriate use
High Risk	2 or more days 5-7 units or 1 or more days more than 7 units or more than 1 time inappropriate use	2 or more days 4 units or 1 or more days more than 4 units or more than 1 time inappropriate use

3. Risk of Developing Dependence

Score is a combination of

- # of days alcohol-free (Q. 1)
- # of days on which it was difficult to stop drinking (Q. 3)

	MALE OR FEMALE
Low Risk	1 or more days alcohol-free and 0 days difficulty
Increased Risk	0 days alcohol-free and/or 1 or more days difficulty

Overall Drinking Pattern

Score is a combination of the 3 scores above.

Low Risk Pattern	Low Risk on all 3
Increased Risk Pattern	Low Risk on any 2 but Increased Risk on the other
High Risk Pattern	Increased Risk on 2 or more or High Risk on 1 or more

Be sure to indicate the pattern in the appropriate box on the screening form. On the *Measuring Your Risk* take-home card, circle all risk levels that apply. Discuss results with the individual (see following pages for suggestions).

Low-Risk Drinking for Adults

To reduce long-term health risks,

- do not exceed weekly limits
15 units for men
10 units for women
- avoid drinking on some days

To reduce injury and other harms,

- do not exceed daily limits
4 units for men
3 units for women
- adjust your drinking according to the setting

Do not drink when

- operating vehicles, machinery or tools
- taking medicines or other drugs
- dealing with health problems
- making important decisions
- providing care to others

The safest option is to not drink at all

- during pregnancy
- when planning to become pregnant
- before breastfeeding

Harm reduction tips

- drink in safe environments
- have no more than **2** units of alcohol in any **3**-hour period
- eat before and while drinking
- alternate with non-alcoholic drinks



5% Alc
350 ml
1 unit



12% Alc
150 ml
1 unit



40% Alc
1.5 oz
1 unit

Discussion Framework and Aids

Clinicians are encouraged to adopt a motivational approach that is collaborative, empathic, and non-judgmental. This approach appeals to the participant's own capacity to reflect on their conduct, recognize need for change and to act on this. It thus evokes exercise of personal responsibility and ability to make healthy behavioural changes, drawing on available resources. This is best facilitated by a clinician being attentive, using open-ended questions, respectfully working through ambivalence, eliciting the participant's motivation, probing readiness, encouraging adoption of solutions they identify with, and reinforcing their self-efficacy to employ those strategies successfully.

The screening debrief interview helps the participant situate their own reported drinking pattern along a continuum of risk and consider appropriate changes and means toward achieving them (including accessing sources of support).

“**Low-risk**” bracket answers to the questionnaire items allow the clinician a chance to

- commend respondents,
- emphasize benefits,
- encourage further behaviour that avoids harm.

“**Increased and high risk**” bracket answers afford the clinician an opportunity to

- assess openness to and motivation for change,
- relate to obstacles/barriers, and
- encourage a course of change the participant proposes and chooses.

Questions and comments offered below are suggested as examples clinicians may wish to use or adapt within such a discussion framework.

Risk to Long-term Health

The likelihood that someone will suffer long-term health consequences as a result of alcohol consumption can be assessed simply from the total number of units of alcohol consumed in a typical week.

	Suggestions for comments/questions
Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good news/Congratulations! Remaining within this bracket reduces your chance of getting various cancers and other illnesses (e.g., liver disease). Continue to monitor your intake; it's best to keep it comfortably within this range.
Increased Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your weekly consumption raises your odds of developing serious health problems in the future. What do you think you could do to reduce your risk (while retaining any benefits you might enjoy from use of alcohol)? What, if anything, stands in the way of you changing your drinking habits? What immediate steps do you think you need to take? Who do you have to support you in lowering your weekly intake? How might they assist you? You can make it happen!
High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your weekly consumption puts you at substantial risk of serious health problems in the future. Risk rises rapidly at these levels. [Questions as above for those in the risky bracket] Don't count yourself out. Like others, you can succeed in cutting back (even if it might be hard, take time, and require help)!

Risk for Immediate Harm

The risk of suffering immediate or short-term consequences from alcohol is related to an individual's pattern of use. The risk increases with level of use on a given occasion or when alcohol use is combined with various other activities such as driving, using machinery, situations where alertness is required, use of depressant substances including medications, pregnancy or breastfeeding.

	Suggestions for comments/questions
Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent result! By not getting drunk and not drinking at the wrong time, you avoid injury and damage to yourself and others! In your opinion, what sorts of harms are most widely recognized as coming from intoxication (or from drinking in certain situations)? Keep up the good performance here!
Increased Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your pattern of consumption runs a risk of serious injury or damage to yourself or others. What might you want to do to decrease this risk (without losing whatever pleasure alcohol brings you)? What could make it difficult to change? What steps would you like to take now? Who can help and how? You can make a difference here!
High Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This pattern of consumption puts you and others in real jeopardy of serious harm. What would be an appropriate strategy for you to reduce that risk? How might you get started? What barriers might there be to a transition for you, and how do you think those could best be handled? Who do you think can help you make changes here to your current practice? In what ways can they support you? People, yourself included, can turn things around! It will be well worth it!

Risk of Dependence

The risk of developing dependence is indicated by the number of days an individual reserves as alcohol-free, and by the number of days in which the individual finds it difficult to hold back from the next drink.

	Suggestions for comments/questions
Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An encouraging result here! ▪ It's a good idea to keep one or two days alcohol-free (and space your drinking out evenly over the remainder of the week). ▪ No anxiety over stopping after you've had some alcohol is a good sign. ▪ Some stress in that situation would suggest your system was starting to need more to get the same effects. ▪ Keep it going to stay in control!
Increased Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Either or both of these signals a risk for becoming dependent. ▪ Inability to stop drinking after consuming some can indicate increased tolerance to alcohol, and also increased reliance on it. ▪ If you are experiencing more severe symptoms, you need to seek special help. ▪ What do you think you might be able to do in order to ensure control? ▪ What, if any, are the biggest obstacles that might stand in your way? ▪ How do you think you should begin now? ▪ What kind of support do you have? ▪ A lot of people have taken charge of their drinking. You can be on top of it too!

Overall Risk Profile

An overall drinking profile reflects a cumulative status combining results on all three risk categories (risk to long-term health, risk of immediate harm, risk for developing dependence).

	Suggestions for comments
Low Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Well done! Keep it going! ▪ It's a good idea to monitor your drinking on a regular basis to keep a handle on it. ▪ You can do this using the online check up at www.alcoholreality.ca. The <i>Measuring Your Risk</i> card also lists other resources.
Increased Risk or High Risk	<p>Counsel is essentially the same for both risky and hazardous patterns. Beyond the summary that follows in the next bullet are two different sets of wrap-up remarks, in candid recognition of whether the person shows any or no readiness to pursue change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ We've clarified how and where your pattern leaves you—and others—at real risk or considerable risk for significant harm. ▪ You've indicated some readiness to change your habits to reduce that risk. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I commend you and invite you to consult various resources listed on the <i>Measuring Your Risk</i> information card. ▪ I'd also encourage you to seek support from family and friends and, as needed, from health professionals like a doctor or a substance use counsellor. ▪ At this point you don't plan to make significant changes. I would encourage you to monitor your intake and keep in mind future steps you might want to take. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Measuring Your Risk</i> card lists resources you can consult. If you wish later to seek support from a health professional such as a doctor or substance use counsellor, they can help! ▪ Many who have chosen change have had very positive outcomes! Good luck!