

Know your alcohol limits during the festive season

Drinking too much alcohol can have long-term effects on health. People should consider setting limits for themselves and keep an eye on how many drinks they're having over the festive season. It's also important not to binge drink.

Drinking guidelines

Christmas is a great time to relax and meet up with family, friends and work colleagues to celebrate, but it is very easy to overindulge.

[Alcohol guidelines](#) recommend that both men and women drink no more than 14 units a week, to keep health risks from drinking alcohol to a low level.

If anyone does drink as much as 14 units a week, it's best to spread this evenly over three days or more – don't 'save up' your units for a particular day or a party.

Binge drinking is associated with particular risks to health, including damage to the liver, heart, brain and stomach.

You can find out more the [how alcohol affects your health page](#).

If you're pregnant, or are trying for a baby, as a precaution [you should not drink any alcohol](#) at all.

Tips and advice

Some tips for managing your drinking:

- eat before or while drinking and avoid salty snacks, which make you thirsty
- be assertive – don't be pressured into drinking more than you want or intend to
- know your limits and stick to them
- stay busy, don't just sit and drink – dance or have a game of pool if you're at a pub
- try not to confuse large measures of alcohol with standard measures (for example, a glass of wine served at a party or at home may be much larger than the standard 125ml)
- keep track of your drinks and don't let people top up your drink until it's finished
- try alternating alcoholic drinks with water or other non-alcoholic drinks
- add plenty of mixer to your drinks to make them last longer
- avoid rounds, 'shouts' and kitties – drink at your own pace, not someone

else's

- drink slowly – take sips, not gulps

Mental health

[Alcohol](#) can also have an impact on your [mental health](#), and if you're hungover you can feel anxious and low.

Some people may feel down over Christmas and drinking can make this worse.

If you think someone might be in need of immediate help, find out what to do at the page below:

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call [Lifeline](#) on:

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

[Take time to check your oil tank](#)

Take time to check your oil tank during the cold weather to protect your pocket and the environment. As well as the financial cost of losing heating oil, it can also cause serious problems to the environment by polluting rivers, harming wildlife and contaminating ground and drinking water.

Monthly check

'Clean-up' costs of an oil spill can be significant and are not always covered by household insurance policies.

You should check your tank and its pipes once a month and if you find a problem it should be fixed as soon as possible.

You can find more details about what you should do on this page:

If you notice a drop in oil level, don't assume that oil has been stolen. Leaks of underground fuel lines can often be happening for some time before oil contamination can be seen.

Oil leaks or spills

If your tank is leaking, you should act quickly and contact your insurance company.

Try to stop the oil soaking into ground or going down drains.

Don't put off taking action or assume the problem will go away. The quicker the leak can be dealt with, the less oil will be lost and damage can be reduced.

You can get more advice about what to do, including arranging a clean-up, on the [oil spills at home page](#).

To report an oil spill or leak that could affect rivers or coastal waters, you should contact the [Northern Ireland Environment Agency](#)'s (NIEA) 24-hour water pollution hotline on:

More useful links

[Warning about the pitfalls of subscription payments](#)

People are being warned about the pitfalls of subscription payments linked to free online trials or samples. Ever been locked into a subscription you didn't sign up for? You're not alone.

Subscription trap scams

Known as subscription trap scams, you become locked into a subscription for a service you did not, or were not aware you had, signed up for.

The most common types are for:

- free-trial slimming pills
- anti-ageing products
- health foods
- on-demand TV services
- streaming services
- audio books

In many cases, you can unknowingly end up making monthly payments ranging from between £10 to £70 for a product or service you didn't want.

Subscription traps work by misleading you into signing up for a subscription to goods or services after seeing an advert on social media or a pop-up on a website.

This is commonly done by the retailer promising a free trial, a reduced rate trial, or sample goods where you only have to pay for postage and packaging using a credit or

debit card.

The card details provided are then used to take recurring payments for a subscription using a continuous payment authority (CPA).

This is often not made clear, usually burying the key information in lengthy or unclear terms and conditions.

Advice about dealing with subscriptions

Free-trial offers are often extremely misleading, devised by fraudsters to deceive you and trick you into parting with your cash.

It is essential to be aware of what is involved in accepting offers or incentives to take up a subscription.

When providing bank details for online offers, always read the terms and conditions carefully to make sure you do not get more than you sign up for.

When dealing with subscriptions you should:

- check that the company is genuine – does it have a padlock symbol on the website and a proper contact address and working telephone number?
- research the company by reading online reviews of the site
- look carefully at the wording of the advert - does it make clear that in order to take advantage of an offer you will be enrolled onto a paid-for subscription plan? This information must be presented prominently in the ad itself (not buried in the terms and conditions)
- check payment methods and full cost before you agree to the contract
- check if you can withdraw from the purchase – you have the right to a 14-day cooling-off period for distance purchases of goods within the EU (if the trader has not informed you of your right of withdrawal, the withdrawal period is extended by 12 months)
- not use the product when delivered and return it unused, making sure you get a shipping receipt
- contact your bank – you may want to cancel your bank card to prevent the company from withdrawing more money from your account
- regularly check your bank statements for any unexpected payments and query them if you don't know what they are for

Report a subscription trap scam

If you feel you have been misled into signing up for a subscription you can get advice by [contacting Consumerline online](#).

You can also phone the helpline or email:

Remember, if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.

More useful links

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[Raising awareness of lung cancer symptoms](#)

Lung cancer is more common among smokers, but non-smokers can also develop the disease. It's important to know the signs and symptoms. If you smoke, think about quitting, no matter how long you have been smoking.

Signs and symptoms

Using other types of tobacco products such as cigars, pipe tobacco and chewing tobacco can also increase your risk of developing cancer.

Every year that you don't smoke, your risk of getting serious illnesses such as lung cancer will decrease.

Early detection and diagnosis of lung cancer is important, as treatment can be more effective and chances of survival can be improved. Symptoms may include:

- a persistent cough
- a sudden change in a cough that you have had for a long time
- unexplained weight loss
- breathlessness
- chest pain – this is usually intermittent (stop-start) and is often made worse when breathing or coughing
- coughing up blood-stained phlegm

You should always visit [your GP](#) urgently if you experience any of the symptoms listed above, even if you don't smoke. Around 12 per cent of people with lung cancer have never smoked.

You can find out more, including other signs and symptoms, on the [lung cancer page](#).

Quitting smoking

It is never too late to stop smoking, but the earlier you stop, the better. Smokers who stop for 28 days or more are five times more likely to stop for good.

However, it is not easy and different approaches will work for different people. While some people might be able to do it with very little support, others find that planning ahead and making use of the free stop smoking services that are available can really help them make the decision permanent.

You can get more information at the link below:

If you quit and then start smoking again, accept it, work out why it happened, and focus on how you can avoid it in the future.

It takes several efforts for many people to quit for good, but if you are determined, you will do it.

More useful links

[Think about fitting a carbon monoxide alarm](#)

Have you thought about getting an audible carbon monoxide alarm for your home? You can be particularly at risk from carbon monoxide poisoning when you're asleep, because you may not be aware of the symptoms until it's too late. An alarm could save your life.

Instant warning

An alarm is a useful precaution. You should always ensure your fuel-burning appliances are properly installed and maintained.

It is now compulsory for all new homes in Northern Ireland to have a carbon monoxide alarm installed.

Audible alarms give an instant warning of dangerous carbon monoxide levels. The use of 'black spot labels/ cards' is not recommended.

You can find out more about the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning at the page below:

But alarms must not be regarded as a substitute for proper installation and maintenance of your fossil fuel-burning appliances.

Audible alarms

Audible carbon monoxide alarms come in many varieties and are manufactured by a wide range of companies.

They are sold online and in many shops, including DIY/ hardware stores, supermarkets and trade retail stores.

What to look for when buying an alarm

Before buying a carbon monoxide alarm, always ensure it complies with British Standard EN 50291 and carries a British or European approval mark, such as a CE or Kitemark.

Carbon monoxide alarms should be installed, checked and serviced in line with the manufacturer's instructions.

Particular attention should be made of the lifespan of the alarm, which can range from one to six years dependent on the manufacturer and the expected lifespan of the batteries. Some have replaceable/ removable units, while others are sealed in for the life of the unit.

Where to fit an alarm

Always read the manufacturers instructions for the correct and safe location for installation of the alarm. It's not possible to give specific guidance on the exact location of a detector(s) which suits all types of premises and their usage.

Carbon monoxide is slightly lighter than air, therefore fitting carbon monoxide detectors at a low level is not recommended.

Once the alarm is fitted

Routine procedures recommended by the manufacturer (including testing) should be in the instructions supplied with the alarm and should always be followed.

Any detectors failing a routine test should be returned to the installer or supplier, or be replaced.

Never cover or paint over alarms once installed.

Always test your carbon monoxide alarm to the manufacturer's instructions.

More useful links