

BLIND DATE?  
BLIND DRUNK?  
BLIND PANIC?

Are you worried about  
the sex you have while  
drunk?

*Information about sex and alcohol  
for gay and bi men.*

## Alcohol – the basics

Alcohol is the oldest and most widely used drug in the UK. It's a mood-changing drug and a depressant – but in small doses it acts as a stimulant. When you drink alcohol, it's absorbed through your bloodstream and its effects spread through your central nervous system.

## The highs and lows of alcohol

Alcohol can heighten your mood, making you happier or more affectionate if you feel that way already. It can relax you, lower your inhibitions and make you more sociable and confident.

## The lows

If your mood is low, alcohol can make it lower and is well known for causing aggression. When alcohol lowers your inhibitions, it can put you at risk of harm and affect your judgement. Because alcohol is a depressant it slows down your body's reactions, can cause slurred speech, lack of co-ordination, blurred vision, sleepiness or passing out. Other unwelcome effects are vomiting and dehydration.

Higher doses may cause blackouts, where you can't remember what

happened, and very high doses can lead to alcohol poisoning, which can kill.

Alcohol is a low-level toxin, which is the reason it can damage the heart and liver of heavy drinkers. Excessive drinking kills thousands each year and heavy drinking over a long period can lead to:

- liver disease
- cancers of the throat, mouth and liver
- brain damage.

Addiction to alcohol can be physical – 'the shakes' are a withdrawal symptom. Psychological cravings can give you an intense urge to keep drinking. If someone gets 'the shakes' this means they're alcohol dependent and suddenly coming off alcohol could be dangerous. In this situation consult a doctor.

## Safer alcohol use

Drinking water or soft drinks between alcoholic beverages can help you avoid getting too drunk and losing control. Making sure you drink water before sleeping also cuts down on dehydration and hangover symptoms. Alcohol can make anxiety, depression or sleep problems worse, so should be treated with caution if you're vulnerable to these. Coffee can't sober you up. Only alcohol leaving your system over time does this.

Is your drinking becoming problematic? These can be the signs:

- trying to cut down on drinking
- getting annoyed if people comment on how much you drink
- feeling guilty about drinking or frequently finding your drinking causes problems
- needing a drink first thing in the morning.

## Mixing sex and alcohol

Alcohol can lower your inhibitions and could make you feel affectionate, horny, sexually confident, sexually assertive or experimental. The numbing effect of alcohol can make it harder to ejaculate. Heavy drinkers can lose both their sex drive and ability to get erections.

Alcohol affects people's judgement, which can make them more likely to take risks during sex that could lead to them getting or passing on HIV and/or sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Alcohol can stop you being in control of what you do sexually and mean you can't remember afterwards what kind of sex you had.



## Going on a night out?

### Don't forget your supplies

Make sure you have condoms and water-based lube (on you and back at home) even if you're not planning to have sex – at least you'll be prepared if it happens. If you take HIV medication make sure you have a supply on you and/or where you might end up, such as at a friend's house on or after a night out drinking.

### Consent and assault

Sexual consent means giving your agreement and saying yes to having sex. Alcohol can cause memory blackouts and make you so horny that you may make choices you normally wouldn't be happy with and consent to.

Alcohol can cause confusion, but you always have a right to choose who you have sex with. If you feel unsure or get a bad feeling for any reason, you can always take a break from a sexual situation you don't feel comfortable with and consider whether this is something you want to continue with. If you're not sure, STOP!

You might start having sex with a guy who has consented and they might slowly start to lose consciousness, while you're having sex. Check in with your partner regularly, making sure that they can focus and respond to you verbally. If they become confused, drowsy or their movements are strange, stop straight away. Some guys may give prior sexual consent like 'if I get too drunk, just carry on', but this is a grey area of the law.

If someone has had sexual contact with you without your consent, this is sexual assault. Any time someone inserts their penis into your anus or mouth, without your consent, it is rape. Both are crimes punishable by law.

### What is protected sex

Protected sex is where you use a condom during sex if one of you has HIV and a detectable viral load. Condoms should be used with water-based lubricant as oil-based lube weakens them.

HIV treatment is also a form of protection. How HIV treatment stops HIV being passed on:

- A person with HIV who is taking treatment and has an undetectable viral load cannot pass on HIV.
- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), when taken correctly, significantly reduces the chances of becoming HIV positive. PrEP is a course of HIV drugs taken by an HIV negative person to lower the chance of infection.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), when started in time, can stop HIV infection after sex without a condom (or other exposure) with someone who is infectious – but it does not work every time. PEP is a month-long course of HIV medication taken by an HIV negative person after possible exposure to reduce the chance of getting HIV.

To find out the latest information about PEP and PrEP visit [www.tht.org.uk/pep](http://www.tht.org.uk/pep)

## HIV and viral load

HIV medication reduces the amount of the virus (your viral load) to very low (undetectable) levels. HIV treatment doesn't cure HIV, but if someone with HIV is taking treatment and has an undetectable viral load they cannot pass on the virus.

### Feel out of control? Looking for a fresh start?

No judgements or lectures, just a space for you to talk. If you would like some help around your alcohol use when having sex, we offer one-to-one support sessions with a trained Terrence Higgins Trust worker. For further information, help, support or to answer any questions that you may have, please email: [freshstart@tht.org.uk](mailto:freshstart@tht.org.uk) or call 01273 764 200 Monday to Friday from 10.00am to 5.00pm.

Terrence Higgins Trust,  
61 Ship Street,  
Brighton  
BN1 1AE

## Breaking the cycle

If you are thinking about reducing risks to yourself and others, cutting down or quitting alcohol; you will find further information, including harm-reduction methods with additional help, support and access to an online support group and online counselling at:

[www.tht.org.uk/fridaymon](http://www.tht.org.uk/fridaymon)

FRIDAYMONDAY

THT DIRECT > 0808 802 1221



© Terrence Higgins Trust, March 2017. Terrence Higgins Trust is a registered charity in England & Wales (no. 288527) and Scotland (SC039986). Company reg no 1778149. A company limited by guarantee. If you have any questions or comments about this resource, or would like information on the evidence used to produce it, please email [feedback@tht.org.uk](mailto:feedback@tht.org.uk) The information included in this publication was correct at the time of going to press. We plan to review this publication within two years. For updates or for the latest information, visit [tht.org.uk](http://tht.org.uk)

BLIND DATE?  
BLIND DRUNK?  
BLIND PANIC?

Are you worried about  
the sex you have while  
drunk?

*Information about sex and alcohol  
for gay and bi men.*