

## DEFINITIONS/SEVERITY

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## DEFINITIONS

- Hazardous drinking: people drinking above recognised 'sensible' levels but not yet experiencing harm.
- Harmful drinking: people drinking above 'sensible' levels and experiencing harm.
- Alcohol dependence: people drinking above 'sensible' levels and experiencing harm and symptoms of dependence

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## DEFINITIONS – hazardous drinking

It can be defined as the regular consumption of:

- over 5 units per day for men
- over 3 units per day for women
- Or alternatively, drinking in excess of weekly recommended upper limits for alcohol consumption of 21 units per week for men and 14 units per week for women
- Consuming over 5 units daily on average doubles a man's risk of liver disease, raised blood pressure, some cancers (for which smoking is a confounding factor) and violent death
- For women, over 3 units per day average alcohol consumption increases their risk of developing liver disease and breast cancer.
- These studies used self reported consumption figures.

(S.I.G.N.)

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## DEFINITIONS – dependent drinking

- **Alcohol dependence** is characterised by continued drinking despite harmful consequences (N.I.C.E.)

A definitive diagnosis of dependence should usually be made only if three or more of the following have been present together at some time during the previous year:

- 1 A strong desire or sense of compulsion to take alcohol
- 2 Difficulty in controlling drinking in terms of its onset, termination or level of use
- 3 A physiological withdrawal state when drinking has ceased or been reduced, or drinking to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms
- 4 Evidence of tolerance, such that increased doses of alcohol are required in order to achieve effects originally produced by lower doses
- 5 Progressive neglect of alternative pleasures or interests because of drinking and increased amount of time necessary to obtain or take alcohol or to recover from its effects (saliency of drinking)
- 6 Persisting with alcohol use despite awareness of overtly harmful consequences

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## AUDIT and the definitions of severity

- AUDIT – 10 point test
- Maximum score 40
- Sensitivity 92% specificity 94% in the original validation study
- Lower in some subsequent studies but still at acceptable levels (men>women)
- 'It is recommended that clinical judgment be exercised in cases where the AUDIT score is inconsistent with other evidence, or where there is a history of alcohol dependence'

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## AUDIT and the definitions of severity

- Score of **8 or above** indicates that drinking is hazardous, or worse
- Score of **8 - 15** indicates need for simple brief intervention i.e. structured advice
- Score of **16 - 19** indicates less severe dependence, and need for extended brief intervention
- Score of **20 or more** indicates more severe dependence, and need for referral to specialist service

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## WHEN TO REFER TO SPECIALIST SERVICES

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## WHO TO REFER TO SPECIALIST SERVICES

- Severity
- Harm
- Risk

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## WHO TO REFER ON TO SPECIALIST SERVICES

- People who score > 20 on AUDIT (N.T.A.)
- People who score > 15 on audit ('Consider a comprehensive assessment for all adults referred to specialist services who score more than 15 on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test' - N.I.C.E.)
- People who are dependent (S.I.G.N.)
- Young people aged 10–15 years - to a specialist child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) for a comprehensive assessment of their needs, if their alcohol misuse is associated with physical, psychological, educational and social problems and/or comorbid drug misuse (N.I.C.E.).

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## WHO TO REFER ON TO SPECIALIST SERVICES

Bradford District   
Care Trust

- People who require detoxification and who are not deemed safe to detoxify in the community (N.I.C.E.)
- Repeated failure to benefit from interventions in primary care (stepped care)
- Cognitive impairment
- Severe mental illness/suicide risk
- People with alcohol-related physical disorder (S.I.G.N.)

You and Your Care  
Substance Misuse

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