

This information sheet is the fourth in a series that will be produced by the Public Health Wales central alcohol team. This sheet is designed for Public Health Wales staff and their partners who are involved in dealing with the relationship between alcohol and sport.

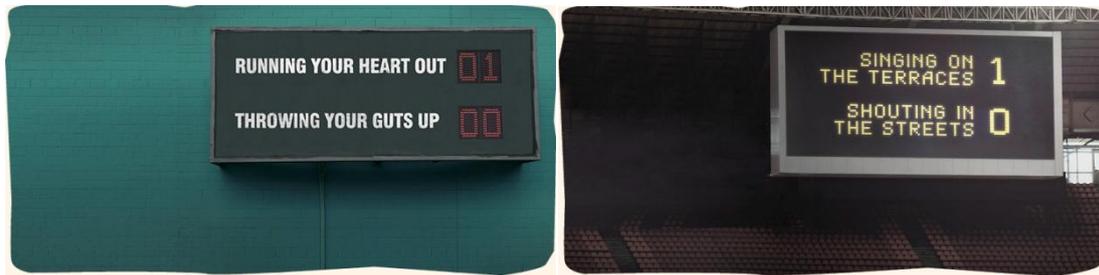
Alcohol and sport are both imbedded in Welsh culture. It is often the case that both go hand in hand. This can be anything from a social drink with team mates before and after matches or a few pints with friends before a rugby international. Alcohol can impact upon sporting events even when we are not drinking ourselves through sponsorship of teams (e. g. until recently, Liverpool FC's long association with Carlsberg) or even the branding of the whole competitions itself (e.g. The Heineken Cup).

So if alcohol is such a key part of sporting events, there's not much we can do to encourage people to change, is there?



Well to start with there's Alcohol Concern Cymru's 'Don't Let Booze Ruin the Result' programme. This is aimed at both participants and armchair fans and suggests simple ideas to help people reduce their drinking around sport.

A key part of the campaign is simple messages highlighting the positive times that can be had when alcohol and sport are combined compared to more negative outcomes.



<http://www.drinkwisewales.org.uk/facts/alcohol-and-sport.php>

What kind of advice does the programme offer?

It's not rocket science, but the simple advice from the website (pasted below) can make a real difference to a sporting day out.

- Pace yourself, and try swapping alcoholic drinks for some soft drinks.
- Drinking in rounds with friends or teammates can lead to drinking more than you meant to. Decide for yourself how much you want to drink, and remember it's always OK to say no to an offer of an alcoholic drink.
- Remember the recommended limits. For men, it's 3 to 4 units a day and for women, 2 to 3 units. A large glass of wine or a pint of strong lager are both about 3 units.

How do local sports clubs and athletes get involved?

Alcohol Concern Cymru inviting local sports clubs and individual players and supporters to get on board by pledging not to let booze ruin the result for them. Every team that signs up to the campaign will receive a pack containing branded water bottles, plus posters and facts and tips on how to enjoy a drink without letting the side down. They will also be entered into a prize draw to win a coaching session for the team with a top Welsh coach.

If you or your club would like to pledge not to let booze ruin the result, email Alcohol Concern Cymru sport@drinkwisewales.org.uk, follow them on Twitter [@drinkwisewales](https://twitter.com/drinkwisewales) or like them on Facebook www.facebook.com/DWWales

So alcohol and sport can be a good mix?

Yes, they can be, but that's not to say that there is not evidence of harm when the two meet.

Such as?

Research shows that reports of domestic violence increase during periods when major sporting events are held, perhaps by as much as 40%. It would be wrong to say that alcohol misuse *causes* domestic abuse and there is no evidence to suggest that sporting events make a person more violent but the combination of the two increase opportunities for perpetrators to be violent or be used as an excuse for violence.

For more information on this area, follow the link below to the Alcohol Concern Cymru paper from 2010

<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/assets/files/Publications/World%20Cup%20briefing%20-%20AC%20Cymru%20May%202010.pdf>

That's really important information about drinking sensibly if we are watching elite level sport, but what impact can the consumption of alcohol have on our own sporting performance, whether it be Sunday League football or a casual jog around the park?

It goes without saying that alcohol is more likely to affect your physical performance for the worse and that any serious athlete will avoid alcohol during training or sporting events. Whilst occasional drinking is acceptable, consuming alcohol in conjunction with physical activity is rarely recommendable.

So there are no positives at all?

There are some perceived psychological and physiological benefits to alcohol consumption to aid performance in sporting activities, although most are considered purely psychological. Alcohol disinhibits you and so can increase your self confidence, helping tackle and reduce performance anxiety. It also decreases your pain sensitivity, meaning that some injuries might be considered by you quite minor when usually they could interfere with your performance. The best known and most widely seen use of alcohol in a sport is both in reducing anxiety and in reducing hand tremor – this kind of consideration might be important in darts or shooting.

The positive effects of alcohol should come only with minimal consumption, any excessive use increases your chances of being affected negatively by the drug and potentially without even realising it.

And how bad are the negatives?

Although widely used as well as being considered socially acceptable, alcohol is still a drug and so will affect your body and your behaviour. The long term effects of excessive alcohol consumptions can cause permanent damage to organ tissue. The behavioural problems associated with alcohol consumption include but are not limited to:

disinhibition, aggression, intolerance and rowdiness. None of these behaviours are conducive to a successful performance in sports.

The chemical effects of alcohol can affect your body physiologically. The fine motor movements which require mental acuteness, such as balance, are negatively affected by alcohol. After a night of average alcohol consumption your anaerobic performance can decrease by anything up to 25%. Alcohol also suppresses appetite, preventing you from adequately providing yourself with enough nutrition, and also dehydrates you. It also reduces the quality of your sleep meaning you are likely to feel tired and poorly rested rather than invigorated and ready to exercise. All these effects contribute to an unhealthy diet which, if the surface effects of alcohol aren't enough already, will damage your physical performance.

So once again the simple message is 'be sensible'?

The key thing to remember with alcohol from a sporting perspective is that you need to plan your alcohol consumption in relation to when you will be participating in sport. The 'best' time to consume alcohol is the day after you have been exercising, or at least 2 days prior to any planned physical sporting activity. Also make sure your body is rehydrated and replenished with carbohydrates before you start drinking alcohol. Be sensible with how much you drink; the medically recommended alcohol limit for men is 21 units a week and 14 for women, this equates healthily to about 2-3 drinks on a single night out.

Where can I find out more information?

From a whole range of places. The internet is full of sound websites offering robust alcohol advice. But refer to the previous info sheet about websites to make sure you're getting your data from good sources. Avoid drinkaware! A good starting point is copied below...

<http://www.physicalactivityandnutritionwales.org.uk/news.cfm?orgid=740&contentid=22515>

PLEASE CHECK THE APPENDIX AT THE BACK OF THIS DOCUMENT FOR SOME SIMPLE ADVICE THAT CAN BE USED WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO SUPPORT A HEALTHIER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPORT AND ALCOHOL



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APPENDIX OF PUBLIC MESSAGES

Be first to the ball

You feel more relaxed when you drink because alcohol slows down the nerves that pass messages around the body. Although alcohol is absorbed quickly into your bloodstream, its effects take longer to wear off so that relaxed feeling can continue well after you've finished drinking. The result is your reactions, coordination, accuracy and balance will be below par if your body has not had time to process all the alcohol in your system.



Hit the water bottle

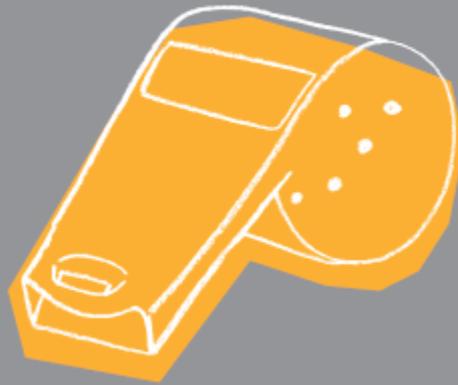
Exercise dehydrates you: beat the thirst with water, not alcohol which will only dehydrate you even more. This is because it blocks the release of anti-diuretic hormones forcing your kidneys to get rid of too much water.

The only way to win is to drink plenty of water before drinking any alcohol, have some more water when you're going to sleep, and put some beside your bed too.



Fading before the final whistle?

The blood sugar your body needs for energy is produced by the liver releasing glucose into the bloodstream. But exercising muscle cannot use alcohol as an energy source – in fact alcohol reduces your body's ability to produce this sugar, so you have less energy and less endurance capacity. Your body will become tired as it works to expel the alcohol, making it even more of a struggle to keep up the pace.





Stay fit all season

The most common sports injuries are soft tissue ones like sprains, bruises and cuts. Alcohol increases the bleeding and swelling around such injuries taking you longer to recover. It also masks pain, so your injury could be worse than you realise. A delay getting treatment can make all the difference to a speedy recovery. If you've been injured, avoid drinking any alcohol until you've had treatment.



Remember the rules of the game

- Avoid alcohol 24 hours before playing or training
- Drink lots of water
- If you've been injured, don't drink alcohol until you've had treatment
- Eat before you drink