

DRINKING ALCOHOL: PROMPTS & REMINDERS RE SAFETY

1. *The upper limits for safe drinking:* 14 drinks/wk for men, 7 drinks/wk for women; no more than 4 drinks at one sitting for men, 3 for women; 30% of Americans drink more. The further these limits are exceeded, the further risk for *alcohol-use disorder*¹ (AUD: unsafe drinking by definition) and its complications. AUD afflicts 1 in 10 Americans (could be a low estimate for Walla Wallans). A “drink” (standard): wine, 5 oz; spirits (gin, vodka, whiskey), 1 ½ oz; beer, 12 oz (a standard bottle).² Hence: one bottle (750 ml) of Scotch contains 17 drinks, one bottle (750 ml) of wine contains 5.
2. *If you drink alcohol, don’t hesitate to answer the CAGE Questionnaire, the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), or both yourself* from time to time (available online). If you suspect yourself of problem drinking, SEEK EXPERT HELP EARLY. The consequences otherwise vary from embarrassing to disastrous. Don’t underestimate subtle impairment of your best practice: one study, for example, has shown that “moderate” drinking (3 drinks in 2 hours, producing an estimated blood alcohol level of 0.076—still within the legal limit for Washington—measured 20 min after the last drink) the night before reduces the quality of a surgeon’s performance *the next morning*!³
3. *I hardly need remind you, but will anyhow, that if you over-drink away from your home, INSIST that someone either drive you home or that your host put you up for the night. You may fancy this: I live in a small city, home is close by and via back streets: I’ll take my chances driving home to bed without great concern for the amount of wine I’ve just consumed. DO NOT SUCCUMB TO YOUR FANTASY! JUST DON’T!* If you find yourself doing so despite intention otherwise, you should seek help for an AUD.

¹ DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Ed), p 490.

² Unhealthy Alcohol Use. Saitz R. N Engl J Med 352: 596-607, 2005.

³ Effect of alcohol on surgical dexterity after a night of moderate alcohol intake. Van Dyken I, Sziabick RE, Sticca RP. Am J Surg 206: 964-8, 2013