



Drink Driving Penalties

Are you planning a night out and don't know whether to drive or take a cab? Or having an after work drink and unsure if you should still drive? Read our guide to learn how alcohol can slow you down and affect your body's responses making your driving unsafe, and our tips on how to avoid putting yourself and others at risk of accidents.

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How alcohol affects driving

Many of the functions that we depend on to drive safely are affected when we drink alcohol:

- The brain takes longer to receive messages from the eye
- Processing information becomes more difficult
- Instructions to the body's muscles are delayed resulting in slower reaction times

You can also experience blurred and double vision, which affects your ability to see things clearly while you are driving. And you're more likely to take potentially dangerous risks because you can act on urges you normally repress.

What are the UK drink drive limits

Levels of alcohol	England Wales Northern Ireland	Scotland
Micrograms per 100ml of breath	35	22
Micrograms per 100ml of blood	80	50
Micrograms per 100ml of urine	107	67

Drink driving penalties

You could be imprisoned, banned from driving and face a fine if you're found guilty of drink-driving.

The actual penalty you get is up to the magistrates who hear your case, and depends on your offence.

You may be able to reduce your ban by taking a drink-drive rehabilitation scheme (DDRS) course if you're banned from driving for 12 months or more. It's up to the court to offer this.

Driving or attempting to drive while above the legal limit or unfit through drink

You may get:

- 6 months' imprisonment
- An unlimited fine
- A driving ban for at least 1 year (3 years if convicted twice in 10 years)

Refusing to provide a specimen of breath, blood or urine for analysis

You may get:

- 6 months' imprisonment
- An unlimited fine
- A ban from driving for at least 1 year

Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink

You may get:

- 14 years' imprisonment
- An unlimited fine
- A ban from driving test before your licence is returned

Drink driving penalties cont.

Other problems you could face

A conviction for drink-driving also means:

- Your car insurance costs will increase significantly
- If you drive for work, your employer will see your conviction on your licence
- You may have trouble travelling to countries like the USA

How to ensure you don't drink and drive

- Arrange within your group of friends who's going to be the designated driver. A designated driver is the person who abstains from alcohol on a night out so they can drive the rest of their group of friends home safely.
- If you live somewhere with good public transport links – take advantage of them. If you're planning on staying out beyond the last train, tube or bus, make sure you've got a couple of taxi numbers.
- If you have no option but to drive, stick to zero alcohol beers, mocktails or standard soft drinks.

Risk of driving the morning after

Although most people are aware of the risks of drink-driving above the legal limit at night, a lot of people get into their cars the morning after a night out drinking, unaware that they could still be over the legal limit to drive. Just because you've been to sleep, it doesn't mean you're no longer affected by alcohol.

Alcohol is removed from the blood at the rate of about one unit an hour – but this varies from person to person. According to the NHS, the speed at which your body processes alcohol can depend on your size, gender, age, the state of your liver, your metabolism, how much food you have eaten, the type and strength of the alcohol you've consumed and whether you're taking medication.

There's nothing you can do to speed up the rate alcohol leaves your system. Having a cup of coffee or a cold shower won't do anything at all to get rid of the alcohol. They may make you feel slightly different, but they won't eliminate the alcohol in any way.

Drivers need to take responsibility and use alternative means of transport after a heavy night drinking.

Tips if you know you are going to be driving the next day

- Opt for lower strength drinks: 4% ABV or lower beer, switching pints for half pints; 12% ABV or lower wine and small measures (125ml); single spirit measures rather than doubles
- Alternate the alcoholic drinks you do have with soft drinks or water
- Stop drinking alcohol well before the end of the night so your body has time to process the alcohol before the following morning.

Affects of drinking at lunchtime

While a stressful day may make a beer or glass of wine with lunch seem like a nice idea, it will make you drowsy so you should avoid having alcohol with lunch. Alcohol is a sedative and even one glass will leave you feeling fatigued for the remainder of the day.