

Levels of Alcohol Impairment

<p>Level 1: Mild Impairment – 0.0 - 0.05% (<i>0.05% is the South African legal limit</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mild speech, memory, attention, coordination, balance impairments • Perceived beneficial effects, such as relaxation • Sleepiness can begin
<p>Level 2: Increased Impairment – 0.06 - 0.15% (<i>0.08% is the UK legal limit</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived beneficial effects of alcohol, such as relaxation, give way to increasing intoxication • Increased risk of aggression in some people • Speech, memory, attention, coordination, balance further impaired • Significant impairments in all driving skills • Increased risk of injury to self and others • Moderate memory impairments
<p>Level 3: Severe Impairment – 0.16 - 0.30%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech, memory, coordination, attention, reaction time, balance significantly impaired • All driving-related skills dangerously impaired • Judgement and decision making dangerously impaired • Blackouts (amnesia) • Vomiting and other signs of alcohol poisoning common • Loss of consciousness
<p>Level 4: Life Threatening – 0.31 - 0.45%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of consciousness • Danger of life-threatening alcohol poisoning • Significant risk of death in most drinkers due to suppression of vital life functions

Source: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/magazine/issues/spring14/articles/spring14pg23.html>

In general, most first-time drinkers are unconscious by about 0.15%.

Unless a person has developed a very high tolerance for alcohol, a BAC (blood alcohol content /concentration) rating of 0.20% represents very serious intoxication.

A range of 0.35% to 0.40% usually represents potentially fatal alcohol poisoning.

Drinking and Driving

The legal **blood** alcohol limit in South Africa is less than 0.05 g per 100 ml.

The legal **breath** alcohol limit in South Africa is less than 0.24 mg in 1000 ml of breath.

Alcohol significantly slows reaction time and distorts your vision, and the effects of a heavy night of drinking could well affect your driving ability the next morning, and you may still even be over the legal limit.

After only one unit of alcohol, your chances of being in an accident are doubled, and when you are at the legal limit of 0.24mg, (level 1) you are four times more likely to be in an accident.

In South Africa 40% of drivers who die on the road have alcohol levels in excess of 0.08 gms / 100 ml.

What Does “Over the Limit” Mean?

The rule of thumb is a maximum of one unit of alcohol per hour, which constitutes 10ml of pure alcohol, based on an adult weighing 68kg. (If you weigh less than 68kg your body will need more time to process the same amount of alcohol).

Our bodies can process only one unit of alcohol each hour, which means that 2 drinks over the space of 1 hour will put you over the limit.

Once the alcohol is in your system your liver is going to need time to process it, and restricting yourself to only one unit per hour will give your body the time it needs to stay sober in the eyes of the law. There are no quick-fix solutions - drinking coffee to get sober is a myth, as is taking a cold shower or drinking a litre of water.

Units of Alcohol per Drink Type

1 unit is equal to 0.02g blood alcohol. (Source: Drunk Driving Laws in South Africa)

- 1 x 75 ml glass of wine (with an alcohol content of 12% to 14%) = 1 unit
- 1 x 250 ml glass of wine = 3.3 units
- 1 x shot/shooter = ½ unit in most instances
- 1 x spirit cooler = about 1.25 units
- 1 x beer = 1.5 units or possibly more
- 1 x cider = 2 units
- 1 x 25 ml tot of spirits = 1 unit
- 1 x cocktail = Between 2 and 4 units

So 1 unit is equal to *two thirds* of a *beer or spirit cooler* with 5% alcohol content.

Remember it takes your body approximately 1 hour to process 1 unit of alcohol (if you weigh more than 68kgs), so you can use the information above as a guide to work out how long it takes for the alcohol to leave your system. (For people under 68kgs add extra time).

Note: Lack of sleep also causes impaired functioning...

If you go 12 consecutive nights on six hours' sleep, it's equivalent to a blood alcohol of 0.1%, (level 2) which is marked by slurred speech, poor balance, and impaired memory. In other words, you're functioning as if you are drunk.

The performance of someone who has been awake for 24 hours is equivalent to that associated with a blood alcohol level 25% more than the current UK legal limit of 0.08% (level 2). This makes them 7 times more likely to have an accident.