

YOUR LIFE

16 BRILLIANT PAGES START HERE!

What kind of drinker are you?

THERE'S SOMETIMES A FINE LINE BETWEEN DRINKING FOR PLEASURE AND RELAXATION - AND SLIPPING INTO DEPENDENCY. TAKE OUR QUIZ TO DISCOVER WHETHER YOUR DRINKING IS PUTTING YOU IN DANGER - AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT.

BY CHARLOTTE HAIGH

THE odd tipple can enhance your social life and help you relax after a difficult day. But some of us are clearly overdoing it - rates of liver cirrhosis in the UK have soared by 900 per cent in the under-45s since 1970.

Heavy drinking may cause depression, especially in women, according to a new study by US and Canadian scientists. So is your drinking just a harmless bit of fun - or is it leading to trouble?

1 When are you most likely to fancy a glass of wine?

- A After being indoors with the kids all day
- B At the weekend, when I'm out with my friends
- C At my usual time, every day just before dinner
- D After a bad day at work

- E I can get cravings at any time of day
- F I like a chilled glass at the weekend with my partner

2 Where do you normally drink?

- A At home at the end of an exhausting day
- B In pubs, bars and clubs
- C In the same place every evening
- D Wherever I am when I'm feeling stressed
- E I do a lot of my drinking at home alone
- F Over dinner in a restaurant or at home

3 How often do you get drunk to the degree that you might forget the odd conversation?

- A I get tipsy from time to time
- B Most weekends
- C Rarely - I stick to my usual amount most of the time
- D I can go over the top if I've had a bad day

- E Frequently - most days of the week
- F Only occasionally, at weddings or Christmas

4 How do you feel about drinking? It is...

- A A great comfort when I feel lonely or down
- B Essential for socialising
- C A pleasant daily habit
- D A big stress-reliever
- E Something I can't imagine life without
- F A nice treat

5 What happens to you when you drink?

- A Sometimes it can make me more tearful
- B I go for days without it but find it hard to stop once I start



- C I feel nicely relaxed and stop after my usual couple of glasses
- D I feel lots better for a while, but am stressed again the next day
- E I often end up upsetting people or doing things I don't mean to
- F I enjoy it but know my limits

Testing times

WORRIED your habits might have harmed your liver? Until now, damage could only be tested by doing a liver biopsy but a new machine called FibroScan, which uses technology similar to that of an ultrasound, can pick up early signs of damage. For more information, call The London Clinic on 020 7525 4874.

Watch your units

The government recommends women drink no more than 2-3 units of alcohol a day; men no more than 3-4. A single unit is equivalent to 8g of alcohol, but the size and strength of drinks can vary. As a general rule:

- 1 small glass of wine, half a pint of beer, or a single measure of spirits = 1 unit
- large glass of wine or double measure of spirits = 2 units
- half a pint of strong lager = up to 2.5 units

Is a friend drinking too much?

Here are some warning signs.

- They get drunk surprisingly quickly on nights out – this may be because they've already been drinking
 - Their personality changes dramatically when they drink
 - They can't seem to stop, even when they're clearly the worse for wear
 - You've noticed they seem on edge, irritable, or even physically shaky before they've had a drink
 - They're always the first to suggest a drink – no matter what the time or event
 - They're angry or dismissive if you mention concerns
- If you're worried about someone's drinking, see the Help a Friend section at www.howtopowerdrink.org.uk

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

Mostly As THE COMFORT DRINKER

You have a tendency to reach for alcohol when you feel tired, down in the dumps or frustrated.

"If you're just sticking to one or two drinks, there's probably not much to worry about," says Grant Sharp, addiction therapist at treatment centre Lynxode Manor (www.lynxode.com/monor.co.uk).

"But using alcohol to cheer you up can easily become habitual. It can also stop you working through emotions, such as coming to terms with the responsibilities of being a new mum, or moving on from a break-up." Try healthier ways to lift your mood and boost your self-esteem – go to an exercise class or take up a hobby.

Mostly Bs THE PARTY DRINKER

You're a classic binge drinker. A binge is classed as double the recommended daily limit. As that's two units for women, equal to two small glasses of wine, a couple of large ones in the pub could tip you into the bingeing category.

Regular bingeing increases your risk of fatty liver disease which can lead to cirrhosis.

"Binge drinking is a pattern that often starts at university," says Liz Cervio, a director of addictions treatment centre Life Works (www.lifeworkscommunity.com).

"But if you carry on drinking like that when your friends have stopped, you may have a more serious problem.

"If you find it hard to stop when you've started, and continue despite negative consequences,

you may need help."

Organise social events that don't revolve around drinking. Sports, dance classes and concerts are good ways to see friends without the need for booze.

Mostly Cs THE REGULAR DRINKER

You drink most days, like clockwork – you probably pour yourself a tipple at the same time each day. "Drinking daily doesn't necessarily mean

you're dependent – if you're sticking to the recommended daily units, your drinking is probably just a pleasant habit," says Sharp.

"However, sometimes having a regular drinking slot can mask a dependency. If you find yourself looking forward to your allotted time for a drink and thinking about it frequently during the day, that could be a warning sign – even if you're not drinking large amounts."

If your regular evening drinking is creeping out of control, try to break the habit by doing something else a few days a week – arrange a coffee with friends or go to the gym.

Mostly Ds THE STRESSED-OUT DRINKER

You may not drink every day, but when you're overworked you reach for the bottle. "Attempting to manage stress with alcohol is not a good idea," says Cervio.

"Firstly, it's highly addictive, so you could quickly end up with a dependency problem. Secondly, alcohol doesn't counteract stress." In fact, as alcohol is a depressant and can trigger anxiety, it could

make you feel worse.

"Simple stress-relief measures are far more effective," says Cervio. "Try having a bath, reading a book, or taking a short walk."

Mostly Es THE SECRET DRINKER

You're overdoing alcohol but attempting to hide it. "Frequently, drinking alone, having no control over the amount you drink or trying to conceal it are signs of a serious dependency problem," says Sharp.

Typical behaviour of a secret drinker could include drinking before you meet up with friends, or leaving the pub early to drink at home alone because you can't trust yourself around others.

Your drinking may have caused problems at work or in your relationship. "If you think you have symptoms of dependency, recognise that you have a psychiatric condition and need help," says Sharp. Call Drinkline on 0800 017 0202.

Mostly Fs THE HEALTHY DRINKER

If you've answered the questions honestly, you're a safe, moderate drinker.

You don't drink habitually – you might have a couple during the week with dinner, but you save any over-indulgence for rare special occasions.

It's not an effort for you to go without alcohol. If you can keep your drinking safe, you'll be doing your health some good.