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**Coverage**  
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**Theme**  
Health and Care

# Drinking: adults' behaviour and knowledge in 2002

Eighty one per cent of all respondents said that they had heard of measuring alcohol consumption in units. This was similar to the 80 per cent who were aware of units in 2000 (79 per cent in 1997) and higher than the 75 per cent in 1998, according to a survey report\* published today by the Office for National Statistics.

Fifty per cent of those who had drunk beer in the last year knew that a unit of beer is half a pint; however, nearly one in four gave an amount that was wrong.

Over a quarter (27 per cent) of those who had heard of units, had seen unit labelling on alcohol, a significant increase from 23 per cent in 2000.

The most frequently mentioned outlet where unit labelling had been seen was a supermarket or shop (76 per cent of those who had seen unit labelling). Pubs were mentioned by a quarter, an increase since 2000 when 16 per cent said they had seen unit labelling in pubs.

This report is the fourth presenting results from questions about drinking which were included in the ONS Omnibus survey at the request of the Department of Health. The questions were asked in March and April 2002 and this report looks at changes over the period 1997 to 2002.

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[www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6990](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6990)

Other key findings from the survey include:

### **Knowledge of units**

Knowledge of units among women had increased between 1998 and 2000, but remained fairly similar in 2002: for example, the proportion of women who drank wine who knew that a unit of wine is a glass increased from 51 per cent in 1998 to 60 per cent in 2000 and 61 per cent in 2002. Among men, awareness of the alcohol content of different drinks did not increase significantly over the time period.

Drinkers who had heard of units were asked whether they kept a check on the number of units they drank: 11 per cent said that they had (similar to the 2000 figure of 13 per cent).

There had been a consistent increase from 54 per cent in 1997 to 58 per cent in 1998 and 64 per cent in 2000 in the proportion of the sample who had heard of daily benchmarks, however, in 2002, this proportion fell slightly to 60 per cent.

About one male drinker in ten had discussed drinking in the last year with their GP or someone else at the surgery, or a doctor or other medical person elsewhere. Women were less likely to have had discussions (only 6 per cent had done so). There was no significant change since 2000.

### **Places where people buy alcohol**

The outlets where people were most likely to have bought alcohol in the last year were supermarkets (71 per cent), licensed bars (70 per cent), and restaurants (61 per cent). These proportions were very similar to those found in 1998 and 2000.

There was very little change between 1998, 2000 and 2002 in the proportions of people who had bought alcohol from different outlets in the previous week.

Men were about twice as likely as women to have bought alcohol from a bar in the past week either for themselves or others to drink (43 per cent compared with 22 per cent) and nearly twice as likely to have bought alcohol from an off-licence (10 per cent compared with 6 per cent).

There was no difference overall in the proportions of men and women who had bought alcohol at a supermarket in the previous week: 26 per cent of both men and women had done so. This was similar to 1998 when 25 per cent of men and 26 per cent of women had bought alcohol from a supermarket in the previous week.

### **Where people drank last week**

As in 2000, the most frequently mentioned place where people who drank at least once or twice a week drank alcohol was at home – 47 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women had drunk alcohol in their own home in the previous week, and a further 1 in 10 had been in someone else's home.

Women were more likely to say that they had drunk at home than in 2000 (58 per cent in 2002 compared with 51 per cent in 2000), but there were no other statistically significant differences over the time period.

### **Who people drank with last week**

Among men, 11 per cent had drunk alone and 33 per cent had been with one other person. Women were more likely to have been drinking with one other person than men (42 per cent).

Among men who drank last week, over half (54 per cent) had drunk with their friends, and 42 per cent had been with a spouse or partner. Conversely, women who drank last week were more likely to have been drinking with a spouse or partner, 53 per cent, than with friends (43 per cent). These percentages were not significantly different to those found in 2000.

### **What people drink**

Half of all alcohol drunk was beer – 41 per cent was normal strength beer and a further 9 per cent was strong beer (defined as being 6 per cent or more alcohol by volume). This was similar to the 1998 and 2000 figures.

## Patterns of drinking

Three tenths (30 per cent) of the men who usually drink at least once a week and 22 per cent of the women had had a drink on five or more days.

Just over one quarter (26 per cent) of men had drunk more than 8 units on at least one day in the previous week. The proportion who had done so varied sharply with age, ranging from 52 per cent of men aged 16-24 to just 8 per cent of men aged 65 and over.

Women were much less likely than men to have drunk heavily – 16 per cent of women had drunk more than 6 units on at least one day in the previous week.

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey carried out by the ONS each month on behalf of a range of government departments and other public and non-profit making bodies.
2. A unit of alcohol is approximately equivalent to a half pint of beer, a small glass of wine or a single measure of spirits.
3. Current government advice on drinking is that regular consumption of between three and four units a day for men and two to three units a day for women does not carry a significant health risk, but consistently drinking more than four units a day for men, or more than three units for women, is not advised. These recommended maximum number of alcohol units that people should drink in a day are referred to as daily benchmarks.
4. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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