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**Coverage**  
Great Britain  
**Theme**  
Health and Care

## Fewer men exceeding daily sensible drinking benchmarks

### *Smoking and drinking among adults 2005 and Drinking: adults' behaviour and knowledge 2006*

The proportion of men in Great Britain exceeding the government's daily sensible drinking benchmarks fell from 39 per cent in 2004 to 35 per cent in 2005, according to new data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Men are more likely than women to exceed government benchmarks on sensible drinking at least one day during the previous week (35 per cent compared with 20 per cent of women) according to a report on smoking and drinking among adults, based on the General Household Survey

The key findings of the report include:

- Seventy-two per cent of men and 57 per cent of women had had an alcoholic drink on at least one day during the previous week in 2005.
- The proportion of women exceeding daily benchmarks remained at a similar level - 20 per cent in 2005 compared with 22 per cent in 2004.

The 2005 figures support previous indications that the recent upward trend in heavy drinking among young women may have peaked. The proportion of 16 - 24 year old women who had drunk more than six units on at least one day in the previous week increased from 24 per cent to 28 per cent between 1998 and 2002 but then fell to 26 per cent in 2003, to 24 per cent in 2004, and to 22 per cent in 2005

Knowledge of daily benchmarks and measuring alcohol in units had increased among both men and women since the previous survey in 2004. The proportion of adults who had heard of daily benchmarks had increased from 61 per cent in 2004 to 69 per cent. Eighty-six per cent of people said they had heard of measuring alcohol consumption in units; an increase from 83 per cent in 2004.

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### **Other key findings from the General Household survey include:**

Among both men and women, those aged 16 - 24 were significantly more likely than other age groups to have exceeded the recommended number of daily units on at least one day.

More than two fifths of young men aged 16 - 24 (42 per cent) had exceeded four units on at least one day during the previous week, compared with 16 per cent of men aged 65 and over. Among women, 36 per cent of those in the youngest age group had exceeded three units on at least one day compared with only four per cent of those aged 65 and over.

Heavy drinking - defined as over eight units a day for men and six units a day for women - on at least one day during the previous week was more common among men (19 per cent) than women (eight per cent). The proportion of young men drinking heavily (more than eight units on at least one day in the previous week) changed little between 1998 and 2003 but then fell in 2004 and again in 2005.

### **Key findings from the survey Drinking: adults' behaviour and knowledge 2006:**

Around one in seven (14 per cent) male drinkers had discussed drinking in the last year with a GP or health professional, an increase from 2004 (11 per cent). Women were less likely to have discussed their drinking with health professionals (only eight per cent had done so).

People were most likely to have bought alcohol in the last year from supermarkets (70 per cent), licensed bars (66 per cent) and restaurants (62 per cent). Men were twice as likely as women to have bought alcohol from a bar in the last week, either for themselves or others to drink (36 per cent compared with 18 per cent).

Half of all alcohol drunk was beer, over a quarter (28 per cent) was wine or fortified wine and 17 per cent was spirits. Alcopops accounted for four per cent of all alcohol consumed.



The most frequently mentioned place where people drank alcohol in the last week was at home - 46 per cent of men and 58 per cent of women.

**Findings on smoking from the General Household Survey include:**

In 2005, 24 per cent of adults aged 16 or over in Great Britain smoked cigarettes. The proportion of adults who smoked cigarettes fell substantially in the 1970s and the early 1980s – from 45 per cent in 1974 to 35 per cent in 1982. After 1982 it declined gradually until the early 1990s, levelled out during the 1990s and then fell smoothly from 28 per cent in 1998/99 to 24 per cent in 2005.

While men are still more likely than women to smoke cigarettes, the gap has narrowed. In 1974, 51 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women smoked. In 2005 25 per cent of men and 23 per cent of women were cigarette smokers.

Cigarette smoking continues to be more common among adults aged 20 - 34 than other age groups. In 2005, 32 per cent of adults aged 20 - 24 and 31 per cent of adults aged 25 - 34 were smokers compared with 14 per cent of those aged 60 and over.

The proportion of men who were heavy smokers (on average 20 or more cigarettes a day) fell from 14 per cent in 1990 to 10 per cent in 1998. Among women the proportion fell from nine per cent to seven per cent over the same period. Since then the proportions have remained virtually unchanged, although there is a suggestion of a slight downturn in the last couple of years.

In 2005 just over two thirds (68 per cent) of cigarette smokers in Great Britain said that they wanted to give up, though 56 per cent said it would be difficult to go without smoking for a whole day.

Further information on smoking trends can be found in Health Statistics Quarterly

[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_health/HSQ32.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/HSQ32.pdf)

## BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Today ONS publishes new data on drinking and smoking from the 2005 General Household Survey (GHS). It also published an Omnibus survey report on drinking in 2006. Both reports are available free on the National Statistics website:

**Smoking and drinking among young adults 2005:**

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=5756&Pos=6&ColRank=2&Rank=160>

**Drinking: Adults' behaviour and knowledge 2006:**

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=6990&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

2. In 1995 the government changed its guidelines on sensible drinking from weekly to daily benchmarks. Its advice is based on daily benchmarks of between three and four units per day for men and two to three units per day for women.
3. For both surveys, one unit of alcohol is defined as obtained from half a pint of normal strength beer, lager or cider, a single measure of spirits, one glass of wine, or one small glass of port, sherry or other fortified wine.
4. In July 2004 the Government set a new target to reduce the overall proportion of cigarette smokers in England from 26 per cent in 2002 to 21 per cent or less by 2010. In 2005, the proportion of cigarette smokers in England was 24%.
5. The NHS *Cancer Plan* sets a target to reduce smoking prevalence among manual occupation groups to 26 per cent in 2010. In England in 2005, 29% of those in manual occupational groups were cigarette smokers compared with 33% in 1998.
6. **Drinking: Adults behaviour and knowledge** is the sixth report presenting results from questions about drinking included in the ONS Omnibus survey at the request of the Department of Health and the Information Centre for Health and Social Care. The questions were asked of 2,474 adults aged 16 and over in February and March 2006.
7. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
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