

1. YOUR DRINKING

The first line shows the number of drinks that you reported having in an average week in the past month. Different alcohol beverages vary in their strength. We changed your regular drinking pattern into standard “one drink” units.

One standard drink unit equals the following:

**12 fl oz of
regular beer**



**8–9 fl oz of
malt liquor**
(shown in a 12 oz glass)



**5 fl oz of
table wine**



**1.5 fl oz shot of
distilled spirits**
(gin, rum, tequila,
vodka, whiskey, etc.)



about 5% alcohol

about 7% alcohol

about 12% alcohol

about 40% alcohol

Each beverage portrayed above represents one standard drink of “pure” alcohol, defined in the United States as 0.6 fl oz or 14 grams. The percent of pure alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol) varies within and across beverage types. Although the standard drink amounts are helpful for following health guidelines, they do not reflect customary serving sizes.

All of these drinks contain the same amount of the same kind of alcohol: 0.6 fluid ounces of pure ethyl alcohol.

How much is too much? Any alcohol use can be unsafe for certain health problems such as HIV infection or liver disease.

From your pre-treatment evaluation, we calculated your AUDIT-C (Alcohol Use Disorder Identification Test – Consumption) score, which reflects your recent alcohol consumption.

The AUDIT-C is a scale devised by the World Health Organization to identify alcohol-related risk. Lower scores reflect reduced risk of developing an alcohol use problem and lower evidence of harm from drinking.

2. BLOOD TESTS

Your pre-treatment evaluation also included recent blood tests. These blood tests are negatively affected by drinking and/or are important in patients living with HIV. Normal test results do not guarantee that you are in good health (for example, that your liver is functioning normally). An abnormal score on one or more of these tests, however, probably reflects unhealthy changes in your body resulting from alcohol use. By abstaining from alcohol, you can improve these abnormal blood test results.

Some tests are directly related to how the liver is working. Your liver is extremely important to your health. It is involved in energy production and the removal of toxins such as alcohol from your bloodstream. Alcohol damages the liver. After a

BLOOD TESTS *(continued)*

long period of drinking, parts of the liver begin to die, a process called cirrhosis. But, physical changes in the liver can be caused by drinking long before cirrhosis appears. As the liver becomes damaged, it leaks enzymes into the blood and is less efficient in doing its work. This can be reflected in abnormally elevated values on the tests reported in this section.

Elevated values on any of these tests should be taken seriously. They do not happen by chance and can be related to physical changes in the body caused by drinking. Talk to your doctor who is knowledgeable about the effects of alcohol on the body.

Untreated hepatitis C infection can cause ongoing liver injury. Alcohol abstinence is important for reducing the negative health effects of untreated hepatitis C on the liver.

In patients living with HIV, CD4 cells, which help your body fight infection, are attacked by the HIV virus. If CD4 cells are less than 200 cells/mm³, that is considered to be AIDS and you may be more susceptible to infection. Alcohol abstinence may reduce risk of low CD4 count.

HIV-1 viral load reflects how much virus is circulating in your blood. The goal of HIV treatment is for this to be undetectable. Alcohol abstinence may reduce the risk of a higher HIV viral load.

The VACS Index is a score based on several different blood tests to reflect your overall health. The score can predict your survival over the next 5 years. Every 5 point decrease in this score, decreases your risk of premature death over 5 years by approximately 3%. This number can get better if you adhere to your medications and refrain from alcohol use.

3. USE OF WEB-BASED SELF-HELP MATERIALS

The internet can be a useful resource to help learn about the impact of alcohol and ways to decrease drinking. We encourage you to visit a number of the websites listed below and use them to help decrease the adverse impact of alcohol on your health. If you do not have access to the internet at home, you may access internet services within the VA or consider using your local public library.

Some of these websites are specific to Veterans and provide *screening and information*:

<http://checkyourdrinking.net>

<http://www.drinkerscheckup.org>

<http://www.drugscreening.org>

Some of these websites have been produced for Veterans and others designed to help you *decrease your drinking*:

<https://www.hiv.va.gov/patient/daily/alcohol-drugs/overview.asp>

<https://vetchange.org/home/index2>

<http://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/>

Please investigate these sites and find one that you feel comfortable using regularly.