THRIVE WITHIN MENOPAUSE

UNDERSTANDING HOW ALCOHOL AFFECTS WOMEN IN PERI/MENOPAUSE

As an Exercise Physiologist and Menopause Specialist, I routinely see women confused about why alcohol suddenly hits harder in their 40's and 50's.

One glass of wine that once felt "fine" can now trigger hot flushes, restless sleep, anxiety spikes, irritability or next-day exhaustion.

This isn't in your head — it's physiology.

And once you understand what's happening inside your body, you can make clear, empowered choices for your health, hormones and well-being.

Below you'll find five key facts plus real-life examples and practical strategies you can apply immediately.

FACT 1: Women Metabolise Alcohol Differently Than Men

Women naturally have:

- Less total body water to dilute alcohol
- Lower levels of enzymes that break alcohol down
- Smaller average body size, meaning one drink is proportionally stronger

Because of this, alcohol becomes more concentrated in the bloodstream, stays in the system longer and impacts the brain, nervous system and organs more intensely.

This is why women often feel:

✓ tipsy faster
✓ more emotional after drinking
✓ a stronger hangover
✓ more disrupted sleep
✓ worsening of peri symptoms

Example you may recognise:

- You and your partner both have one drink — they feel fine, you feel flushed or foggy
- You wake at 2–3am "wide awake" after just one glass
- You feel anxious or wired the next morning

What you can do:

- Switch to lower-alcohol options (e.g., 8–10% wine instead of 12–15%)
- Pour half a glass and sip it slowly
- Track which drinks feel okay and which don't — many women tolerate clear spirits better than red wine
- Use a simple journal to observe symptoms (you can use your Thrive tracker)

Small changes can make a big difference because of female physiology.

Fact 2: Age & Perimenopause Change How Alcohol Is Processed

From your late 30s onward, body composition shifts:

- Less body water
- Changes in liver efficiency
- Slower metabolism
- More medications
- Hormonal fluctuations that affect hydration and sleep

This means the same drink now results in a higher blood alcohol level than it did at 25 or 35.

Perimenopausal women often notice:
✓ stronger emotional reactions
✓ higher heart rate after drinking
✓ night sweats after even a small amount
✓ "wired but tired" feeling at bedtime
✓ worse sleep quality

Example you may recognise:

- A drink at 8pm = sweating through the night
- A drink after a stressful day = immediate heart racing or irritability
- Alcohol that never caused headaches before suddenly does

What you can do:

- Move your drink 2–3 hours earlier
- Drink over a longer period (e.g., 1 drink over an hour, not 10 minutes)
- Try having a drink with dinner, not before
- Prioritise hydration before and after drinking (500ml water rule)

Adjusting timing alone often reduces night sweats and sleep disruption

Fact 3: Many Women Drink More in Midlife — Even While Tolerating Less

Research shows women in their 40s–60s often increase alcohol intake due to:

- Stress
- Family pressures
- Work demands
- Broken sleep
- Overwhelm
- Habit
- Social expectations
- “Wine-o’clock” culture

Combine higher intake with lower tolerance and it’s easy to see why symptoms worsen.

Examples you may recognise:

- The evening glass of wine that starts as relaxation becomes a nightly habit
- You look forward to wine because it feels like your “switch off” moment
- One drink becomes two when the day has been stressful

What you can do:

Try one of these gentle habit experiments:

- Choose alcohol-free weekdays (e.g., Wed + Thu)
- Swap your first drink for a non-alcoholic option (sparkling water with lime, kombucha, alcohol-free gin)
- Create a new “wind-down” ritual: a walk, Pilates stretch, herbal tea, magnesium drink or a 5-minute breathing practice
- Use a “swap-and-switch” rule: drink your substitute first, alcohol second

You don’t need to eliminate alcohol — just interrupt the automatic pattern

Fact 4: Alcohol Impacts Nearly Every System of the Body — Especially in Perimenopause

Here’s how alcohol interacts with symptoms women commonly report in midlife:

Neurological

- Increases anxiety
- Impacts cognition
- Amplifies emotional reactivity
- Can worsen brain fog

Hormonal

- Disrupts temperature regulation
- Worsens hot flushes & night sweats

- Impacts mood regulation
- Affects libido

Bone Health

- Reduces bone mineral density
- Increases fracture risk (crucial for postmenopausal women)

Exercise Performance

- Slows muscle recovery
- Reduces hydration
- Lowers glycogen stores
- Increases injury risk

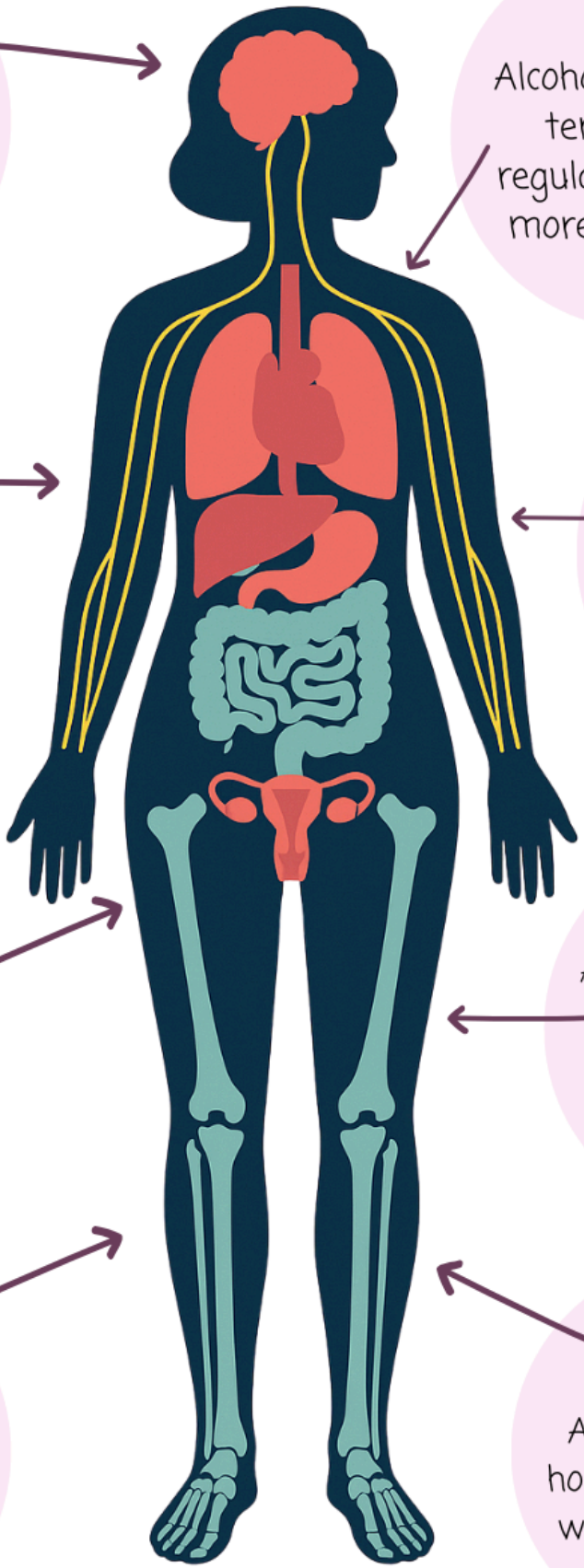
Sleep

- Reduces REM sleep
- Causes middle-of-the-night waking
- Makes early-morning anxiety worse

What you can do:

- Avoid drinking on heavy training days (your muscles need recovery).
- Have a higher-protein meal when drinking to stabilise blood sugar.
- Have electrolytes after alcohol to support hydration.
- Practise paced breathing before bed to calm the nervous system.

When your hormones are already fluctuating, alcohol acts like a magnifier.



Moderate alcohol use may raise women's risk of brain decline

Alcohol can disrupt temperature regulation, causing more hot flushes

Drinking increases the risk of multiple cancers, especially breast and digestive cancers

Women's livers are more sensitive to alcohol, causing faster damage

Alcohol consumption can reduce bone density and increase fracture risk

Alcohol first dehydrates you, then causes rebound water retention, leading to thirst and puffiness

Drinking can delay recovery by reducing energy stores, hydration, and muscle repair signals

Alcohol can disrupt hormone balance and worsen menopausal symptoms

Fact 5: “Moderate Drinking” Is Less Than Most People Think

Guidelines define moderate drinking as 5–7 standard drinks per week.
But in perimenopause, “moderate” can still disrupt:

- ✓ sleep
- ✓ weight regulation
- ✓ hot flushes
- ✓ recovery
- ✓ mood and anxiety
- ✓ cognitive function

Examples you may recognise:

You are technically a “moderate” drinker but still feel:

- puffy
- bloated
- tired
- irritable
- more symptomatic

What you can do:

Try one of these two effective reduction strategies:

Option 1: Reduce drinks per occasion
If you normally have 2 glasses, try 1.
Your weekly total drops significantly.

Option 2: Reduce drinking days
Keep social drinking, skip weeknight drinking.
This can halve alcohol intake with minimal discomfort.

Small tweaks deliver big hormonal wins.

Decoding the guide to standard drinking in Australia

In Australia’s pub culture and social scene, it’s easy to lose track of how much you’re actually drinking — especially when glass sizes, pours and drink strengths vary so much. That’s why understanding what counts as a standard drink is so important. It’s a simple piece of knowledge that helps you enjoy your night out, stay within safer drinking limits and make informed choices about your alcohol intake.

This guide breaks down what a standard drink really is in Australia and how it differs across common beverages like beer, wine, cider and spirits.

What Is a Standard Drink?

You've probably seen the phrase "standard drink" before — but what does it truly mean?

In Australia, a standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. It's not based on the size of the glass or the style of drink, but the actual alcohol content. This helps you keep track of your intake, no matter what you're drinking.

How to Calculate a Standard Drink (If It's Not on the Label)

If the container doesn't list standard drink information, you can calculate it using this formula:

Volume of container in litres × % alcohol by volume × 0.789 = number of standard drinks

Where:

- **1 litre = 1000 ml**
- **0.789** = the specific gravity of ethyl alcohol

This formula helps you understand the true alcohol content of any drink, whether it's a beer, glass of wine, cocktail or homemade mix.

Why This Matters

Different alcoholic drinks contain very different amounts of alcohol — even if they look similar in size. Let's explore how standard drink values vary across popular beverages so you can make confident, informed decisions whenever you drink.

Standard Drinks by Alcohol Type - Australia

Understanding how much alcohol is actually in your drink is key to staying within recommended limits, making informed choices and recognising when one drink actually equals two (or more). Here's a deeper look at what's inside common Aussie favourites.

🍺 BEER

Beer strength varies widely, which means two drinks that *look* the same can have completely different alcohol content.

Full-Strength Beer (4.8–5% ABV)

- 375 ml can/stubbie = 1.4–1.6 standard drinks
- This means even a "single beer" can push you over one standard drink quickly
- A pint (570 ml) of full-strength can jump to 2.1–2.3 standard drinks.

Mid-Strength Beer (3.5% ABV)

- 375 ml = 1 standard drink

- This is the most predictable option and why many people choose it for longer social events.

Light Beer (2.7% ABV)

- 375 ml = 0.8 standard drinks
- Even though it's lower in alcohol, two cans = 1.6 standard drinks, so it still adds up.

Why this matters:
Most people drink from bottles, schooners, and pints — not "standard drink-sized" glasses — making it easy to underestimate how much you've had.

🍷 WINE

Wine pours are almost always larger than the standard drink measure.

Standard Drink

- **100 ml at 12.5% ABV = 1 standard drink**
  (This is a *very* small pour compared to typical serving sizes.)

Realistic Pours

Most wine glasses hold 150–250 ml — and many home pours are more generous.

- 150 ml glass = 1.5 standard drinks
- 200 ml restaurant pour = 2 standard drinks
- 250 ml large glass = 2.5 standard drinks

Why this matters:
A "couple of glasses of wine" can easily equal 4–5 standard drinks, especially with higher-ABV wines like Shiraz, fortified wines, or Prosecco.

🥃 SPIRITS

Spirits are the most concentrated form of alcohol and even tiny differences in the pour can double your intake.

Standard Drink

- 30 ml shot at 40% ABV = 1 standard drink

But here's the catch

- Many bars use 45 ml pours → 1.5 standard drinks
- Home pours often range from 40–60 ml → 1.3–2 standard drinks

Cocktails

Most cocktails include:

- 2–3 shots
- Sometimes multiple types of spirits

This means one cocktail often contains:
➡️ 2–3+ standard drinks
(Especially margaritas, espresso martinis, mojitos, and tiki-style drinks.)

Why this matters:
Cocktails taste sweet and easy to drink, which makes it harder to detect just how strong they are.

🍸 PRE-MIXES (RTDs)

Ready-to-drink cans are extremely popular — and deceptively strong.

330 ml premix at 5% ABV

- ≈ 1.3 standard drinks

375 ml premix at 6–8% ABV

- ≈ 1.6–2.4 standard drinks

Examples:

- Vodka cruisers
- Canadian Club & Dry
- Jack Daniels & Cola
- Gin & soda cans

Why this matters:
RTDs taste light, fruity, or refreshing — but often contain more alcohol than a beer of the same size.

🍏 CIDER

Ciders vary widely depending on sweetness and fermentation strength.

375 ml cider (4.5–5% ABV)

- ≈ 1.4–1.5 standard drinks

Some craft ciders can be 6–8% ABV, pushing the standard drink count to 2+ per bottle.

Why this matters:
Cider is often perceived as “lighter” or “less alcoholic,” but many varieties contain the same amount of alcohol as full-strength beers — or more.



If you would like to drink less - here's a recap on a few things you could try

If you have been considering drinking less alcohol overall and would love to have fewer negative side effects of drinking, try testing some of these strategies out.

1. Watch the **TYPE** of alcoholic beverage you choose. Try experimenting with the type of alcohol you consume to see if you can find one that gives you fewer negative side effects, i.e. beer (half strength or zero alcohol), wine (pinot noir over a Merlot) or spirits (clear v's dark).
2. Watch **HOW MUCH** you drink. Because in midlife you have less blood to dilute the alcohol and less water in your body you might be able to decrease some of the short-term negative side effects of alcohol consumption by ensuring you're well-hydrated while you drink, i.e. Try pairing your alcohol with meals and alternate your alcoholic beverages with water or sparkling water to stay hydrated.
3. Watch what **TIME** of day you drink & how **QUICKLY** you consume your alcohol. As alcohol can make sleep worse, you could try having your alcohol slightly earlier in the day, so it has more time to clear their bloodstream before you go to asleep. Now, please don't take this as if I'm saying to start drinking at 9am because it could be better for you - it's more directed if you were planning on having a few glasses of wine on a particular night, it might be helpful to drink them from 5pm to 7pm vs. 7:30 pm to 9:30 pm or later. Furthermore, if you normally drink 2 glasses of wine in 30 minutes try stretching it out over an hour to give your body more time to metabolise the alcohol.
4. Drink **FEWER** drinks per sitting and **LESS** frequently. If you would like to drink less but don't know where to start here's my example below.

Say your current alcohol consumption looks like this:

Monday: 2 wines while cooking dinner

Tuesday: 2 vodka & coke after school pick up

Wednesday: 1 glass of wine with dinner

Thursday: 2 glasses of vodka & coke after work + 1 glass of wine with dinner

Friday: 2 glasses of wine with dinner

Saturday: 3 glasses of wine at date night

Sunday: 2 beers watching football

Total = 15 drinks per week

Try drinking fewer drinks per bout of drinking.

If alcohol is something you enjoy and still want to have most days, that's okay - just think about lowering the number of drinks per occasion to help your body cope better.

Monday: 1 wine with dinner

Tuesday: 1 vodka & coke after school pick up

Wednesday: 1 glass of wine with dinner

Thursday: 2 vodka & coke after work

Friday: 1 glasses of wine with dinner

Saturday: 2 glasses of wine at date night

Sunday: 2 beers watching football

Total = 10 drinks per week

That's 35% less alcohol for your week while still enjoying a drink on **EVERY day.

Or Try something like this:

Monday: no alcohol

Tuesday: no alcohol

Wednesday: no alcohol

Thursday: 2 vodka & coke after work

Friday: 1 glasses of wine with dinner

Saturday: 2 glasses of wine at date night

Sunday: 2 beers watching football

Total = 7 drinks per week

**That's 55% less alcohol for your week while still enjoying a drink.

There are many options you can explore, these are only some examples, you can play around as much as you like. Remember, this cheat sheet is really to give you specific information about drinking alcohol during peri/menopause and the affects it can bring. It about showing you effective ways to decrease your alcohol consumption.

Final Thoughts

This phase of life isn't about restriction — it's about understanding your physiology, noticing patterns and choosing what supports your energy, hormones and long-term health.

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