

# THE ULTIMATE PARTY POOPER?

It's probably the last thing you want to hear in the midst of the party season, but two new tests can tell you just how much damage booze is doing to your liver. We persuaded three brave women to try them out

YOU KNOW YOU PROBABLY SHOULDN'T BE DRINKING TWO (OR MORE) GLASSES OF SAUVIGNON BLANC EVERY NIGHT. You know the Government has issued warnings about middle-class drinkers consuming 'hazardous' levels (just five large glasses of wine a week for women). But you also know that you feel healthy on the whole, aside from a little groggy first thing. Surely your liver would let you know if it was feeling the strain? Actually, no. 'The early symptoms of liver disease are things we'd blame on everyday life, such as tiredness, lack of concentration, irritability and loss of libido,' says leading liver expert Dr Rajiv Jalan of University College Hospital, London. He explains that you don't get any symptoms – sallow skin, abdominal swelling, dilated veins – until the damage is pretty advanced.

Now, new tests promise to reveal in minutes whether your daily drinks are damaging your health. 'I'm seeing much younger patients with damage now, successful middle-class people in their thirties and forties,' he says. 'These tests are a wake-up call.'

A DIY test called LiverCheck measures levels of two enzymes produced by a damaged liver. You just do a simple pin-prick blood test that's sent off to the lab.

The results come back as green (healthy), amber (not at optimal health), dark amber (possible early signs of liver disease), and red (potentially significant liver damage). The clinic test, Fibroscan at The London Clinic, uses a machine similar to ultrasound that scans the liver and measures inflammation or scarring by excess alcohol. A reading above five is abnormal, while anything over 10 indicates serious liver disease.

## 'I CALL MYSELF A TRAINEE ALCOHOLIC'



Jane Speed, 43, is an advertising executive from Nottingham. She can easily get through a bottle of wine over dinner. 'Every day I say to myself, "I'm having a night off

the booze," but it gets to 7pm and I don't. I'm single, have a high-powered career and a busy social life and alcohol oils the wheels. I have a large glass of white wine if I'm staying in, but if I'm out for dinner with friends I'll have a Bacardi and Diet Coke followed by a bottle of white wine and two more Bacadis. I never feel drunk. 'I call myself a "trainee alcoholic" because I don't need to drink every day, but I like to. I was on strong painkillers all last year too because of a back operation, so I know that could have put a strain on my liver. I do drink lots of water and juice though.'



### Jane's drink diary

**Monday:** half a bottle of white wine, two Bacardis over dinner with a friend.

**Tuesday:** white wine spritzer, half a bottle of rosé wine, liqueur coffee, three Bacardis while staying at hotel with friends.

**Wednesday:** two large glasses of white wine.

**Thursday:** one Bacardi and one white wine spritzer at country pub.

**Friday:** one glass of white wine at lunch with friend; half a bottle of white wine and three Bacardis at friend's for dinner.

**Saturday:** one bottle of white wine and four Bacardis at a family party.

**Sunday:** half a bottle of white wine and three Bacardis with mum over dinner.

**Units consumed:** 58

**LiverCheck results:** amber (not at optimal health)

**Fibroscan results:** 5.3 (abnormal)

**WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS:** 'I'm surprised Jane hasn't got worse results. If she carries on drinking at this rate it will almost certainly catch up with her soon,' says Dr Jalan. 'She needs to be very careful as she is already in the grey area of ▶

Fibroscan results (between five and seven), which means there is likely to be some damage in the liver. I've advised her to stop drinking and come back for another check-up in a few weeks – she has caught the damage at a stage when it is still reversible.'

**WHAT JANE SAYS:** 'I was quite relieved about my results, considering the amount I drink. Obviously, I'd prefer it if I had a totally healthy liver, though. I will definitely be having a couple of drink-free nights a week from now on.'

### 'WILL THE PARTY SEASON DO ME ANY HARM?'



**Rosie Robbins, 28,** is a PR from London. Although she's usually a pretty sensible drinker, her intake has shot up recently.

'In an average week, I'll probably only have a couple of glasses of wine a night, more at the weekend. However, recently I've been to lots of client meetings, parties and events, with non-stop alcohol on offer. I've been drinking cocktails, beer and wine – it's difficult to keep track of the amount because the glasses are large. I've been picking up colds and viruses recently, too. I'm also worried because as a student I lived in Spain for a year and would stay out until 10 the next morning most days, knocking back huge amounts of cheap spirits.'

#### Rosie's drink diary

**Monday:** one bottle of beer and two rum cocktails at work event.

**Tuesday:** two large glasses of wine and two rum cocktails at work party; three beers with dinner.

**Wednesday:** two large glasses of rosé with dinner.

**Thursday:** two beers with colleagues.

**Friday:** nothing – I was coming down with a cold.

**Saturday:** two glasses of red wine, one vodka shot and a cup of punch at friend's party.

**Sunday:** two bottles of beer with a curry.

**Units consumed:** 49

**LiverCheck results:** amber (not at optimal health)

**Fibroscan results:** 3.3 (healthy)

**WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS:** 'While her Fibroscan was normal, showing there is no long-term liver damage, her LiverCheck test was amber, meaning her liver isn't running at its best right now,' says Dr Jalan. 'She's been overdoing it recently, and her liver is struggling under the pressure. You need to drink heavily for

10 years to cause cirrhosis so, although Rosie's student days won't have helped, at least she's been sensible in between then and now. Her tendency to catch viruses is a sign she needs to be careful as binge drinking affects the body's immune function. I've told her to go back to her normal, sensible drinking habits while her liver is able to recover.'

**WHAT ROSIE SAYS:** 'The LiverCheck result was a bit of a shock. It shows how much of an effect drinking heavily every night, even for a short time, can have. When I got my scan results I felt a bit happier because at least I haven't damaged my liver for good. I'll certainly be having more water at work events from now on.'

#### **'DRINKING GOES WITH THE JOB'**



Andrea Thompson, 31, from London, is Grazia's news features director. She drinks a couple of glasses of wine or champagne most nights.

'I love socialising and that usually

involves a couple of glasses of wine. And it's difficult to turn down a glass or two of champagne when you're at a work function. Weekend nights, I'll have three glasses of champagne and a couple of cocktails. Sunday and Monday I give my liver a break. I know I probably drink too much, but it's really my only vice. I eat well, exercise three times a week and drink at least three litres of water a day.'

#### Andrea's drink diary

**Monday:** night off drinking.

**Tuesday:** two small glasses of red wine over dinner with friends.

**Wednesday:** two glasses of champagne at work launch event.

**Thursday:** two glasses of champagne at friend's launch party.

**Friday:** two gin and tonics and two glasses of red wine out for dinner with friends.

**Saturday:** two glasses of red wine over a meal out with my husband Chris.

**Sunday:** night off drinking.

**Units consumed:** 12

**LiverCheck results:** green (healthy)

**Fibroscan results:** 3.7 (healthy)

**WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS:** 'Andrea is a great example of how drinking within the recommended limits and leading a healthy lifestyle can pay off,' says Dr Jalan. 'She has

the perfect liver scan results because she rarely drinks above 14 units a week. Her blood test results are equally good. The fact that she is partial to champagne is helpful because the standard flutes in which it is served equate to one unit, whereas wine glasses are often bigger.'

**WHAT ANDREA SAYS:** 'I'd been worried because, although I don't drink lots, I do drink almost every night. So the results came as a great relief. I put them down to the fact that I mainly drink champagne, which gets me to a happy stage of tipsy fairly quickly so I don't need much. After the scan results I went out to celebrate and had four glasses! Taking the test has made me more aware of my liver health, though, and I'll definitely cut back on weekend binges.' ■

### **UNDOING THE DAMAGE**

\* Try to stick to the guidelines of two to three units a day and have two drink-free days a week. 'The liver has regenerative abilities, to a point. The average person's takes around two days to recover from a night out,' says GP Dr Rob Hicks.

\* Drink coffee. People who drink one cup of coffee a day have a 20 per cent reduced risk of developing alcoholic liver cirrhosis.

\* Cut down on carbs. High-glycaemic foods, such as sweets, sugary foods, potatoes, white bread and white rice, could contribute to fatty liver disease (basically fat in the liver that could lead to cirrhosis), according to new US research. Instead, make sure your diet is full of low-GI foods including fruit, nuts, pulses and wholegrains.

### **AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO UNITS**

Large glass of wine = **3 UNITS**  
Bottle of wine = **10 UNITS**  
Small glass of wine/spritzer = **1 UNIT**  
Bottle of beer = **2 UNITS**  
Shot of spirits = **1 UNIT**  
Glass of champagne = **1 UNIT**  
Cocktail = **3 UNITS**

*To order a LiverCheck test, which costs £99, call 0800 130 0588 or visit [www.livercheck.co.uk](http://www.livercheck.co.uk). For more details about Fibroscan, which costs £205 plus a consultation fee, call 020 7616 7719 or visit [www.thelondonclinic.co.uk](http://www.thelondonclinic.co.uk).*

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