Alcohol: The Basics

Standard Drinks
A standard drink contains 10 grams / 12.5mL of pure alcohol. A label is usually displayed on the bottle or can to describe how many standard drinks it contains. One bottle/can/glass is usually more than one standard drink.

Alcohol Advisory Council guidelines recommend that men have no more than 6 standard drinks per drinking occasion and that women have no more than 4 standard drinks per drinking occasion. Men are advised to have no more than 21 standard drinks per week and women no more than 14 per week. These guidelines are currently being revised and may be reduced in light of new epidemiological evidence.

Everyone is Different
Depending on gender, age, weight and other factors, alcohol may affect some people more than others. Try to keep at least two days a week free of alcohol.

Alcohol and the Human Body
Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. The immediate effects of alcohol consumption can include slurred speech, blurred vision, changes in mood, loss of inhibition, vomiting, loss of balance and clumsiness. These effects are greater with increasing amounts of alcohol. More serious effects can be unconsciousness, alcohol poisoning, coma or death.

Longer-term effects of heavy drinking can cause serious health problems, including alcohol dependence, liver disease, mood changes, cancer (mouth, throat, breast and bowel), sexual difficulties, memory loss or strokes.

Other Effects of Alcohol
Alcohol can affect more than just disease risk. There are acute physical and social harms that may occur if people drink too much. These can include injury, car crashes, getting into trouble with the police, arguments, fights, unwanted or unsafe sexual activity, offending others or doing things later regretted. Controlling drink helps control behaviour.

Alcohol and the Law
Alcohol impairs judgement, which can lead to doing things that wouldn't occur when sober. Some legal considerations to keep in mind are:

- Argumentative, disorderly or violent behaviour can get people in trouble with the police;
- Drinking in many public places in New Zealand such as parks, beaches or on the street can attract a fine.

Drink-Driving
Drink-driving is taken very seriously in New Zealand. In addition to the risk of being injured in a crash and injuring others, there are some hefty penalties including loss of licence, fines, and imprisonment for more serious cases:

- For anyone under 20, the BAC limit for driving is 0.03%. According to the Official NZ Road Code. This is effectively a zero limit - just one drink can result in a charge of drink-driving.
- For anyone 20 or over - the BAC limit is 0.08%. According to the Road Code, it is difficult to say how many alcoholic drinks will result in these limits. It depends on many factors, including gender and body size.

Because of this, and because even small amounts of alcohol can affect driving, the best advice is: any drinks at all, don't drive.

Call a taxi, take a bus or let someone who hasn't been drinking, such as a friend or 'dial-a-driver', drive home.