

Cologne and antiseptic: Russia's killer drinks

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text.

fluctuation
impooverished

mortality
distiller

plausible
demise

prone
abuse

binge
rogue

1. If someone is _____ to something, they are likely to suffer from it or be affected by it.
2. A _____ is a person who produces strong alcohol.
3. _____ are frequent changes in something, particularly in numbers.
4. _____ is the use of something in a bad, dishonest or harmful way.
5. If something is _____, it is likely to be true.
6. A _____ trader or group member is one who does not behave in the same way as others and is considered dangerous.
7. _____ means *very poor*.
8. _____ is the number of deaths in a particular area or group of people.
9. _____ is the time when someone or something stops existing.
10. A _____ is an occasion when someone does too much of something they enjoy doing, e.g. drinking alcohol.

2 What do you know?

Read these statements and decide whether they are *True (T)* or *False (F)*. Then check your answers in the text.

1. The population of Russia is rising.
2. Russians drink more alcohol than any other nation in the world.
3. The Russian economy has grown spectacularly since 2000.
4. More than half the men of working age who die in Russia are killed by alcohol.
5. Illegally produced alcohol is rare in Russia.
6. The World Health Organisation regards Russia as one of the most alcoholic countries in the world.

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Sarah Boseley, health editor, and Luke Harding in Moscow
June 15, 2007

- 1 Almost half of working-age men in Russia who die are killed by alcohol abuse, according to a new medical study which says the country's males die in excessive numbers not just because they drink lots of vodka but because they also consume products containing alcohol, such as eau de cologne, antiseptics and medicines. Some products contain 95% alcohol by volume.
- 2 An international group of scientists looked at a single city in the Urals to establish the effects of the drinking in Russia. Izhevsk was chosen for being a typical industrial city where life is much the same as elsewhere and where death rates match the Russian average. Underlying the work was the question of why life expectancy in Russia is so low: in 2004 it was 59 years for men and 72 for women. Due to the low life expectancy and birth rate, the population in Russia is falling by 700,000 a year.
- 3 Alcohol has always been an important factor in death and disease in Russia, borne out by fluctuations in the death rates linked to changes in lifestyle and politics, says a report on the study, in the *Lancet* medical journal. "President Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign in the mid-1980s was associated with an immediate rise in life expectancy, whereas increased alcohol consumption has been linked to rising mortality in the early 1990s during the transition from communism. Deaths related to alcohol, such as acute alcohol poisoning and liver cirrhosis, showed the greatest fluctuations, with similar trends for other causes plausibly linked to alcohol consumption."
- 4 A study published last year found that Russians, and inhabitants of other former parts of the Soviet Union, drank more than anybody else in the world - an estimated 15.2 litres of pure alcohol per capita each year for over-15s. They also drank more dangerously and were prone to binges, meaning two or more days of continuous drunkenness.
- 5 David Leon, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and colleagues examined records and interviewed the families of 1,750 men who had died in Izhevsk from 2003-05. The men were compared with 1,750 who were still alive. They found that problem drinkers and those who drank alcohol not intended for consumption were six times more likely to have died young than those who did not have a drinking problem. The chances of an early death were particularly high for those who got their alcohol from eau de cologne and other unorthodox sources - they were nine times more likely to die.
- 6 The authors say that men impoverished after losing a job through drinking may be forced to resort to drinking household products containing pure alcohol. Among those who were still alive, 47% who drank such products were jobless compared with 13% who stuck to vodka and beer.
- 7 Overall, 43% of deaths of men aged 25 to 54 were caused by alcohol, a figure that could be applied to all of Russia because of the typical nature of Izhevsk. An estimate in 2002 put the death toll at 27%. The authors say their higher figures could be due to taking into account drinking of household products with very high levels of alcohol, as well as binges.
- 8 "Almost half of all deaths in working-age men in a typical Russian city may be accounted for by hazardous drinking," they write. "Our analyses provide indirect support for the contention that the sharp fluctuations seen in Russian mortality in the early 1990s could be related to hazardous drinking as indicated by consumption of non-beverage alcohol."
- 9 A separate commentary points out that people who get their alcohol from household products often live in poor housing and have bad diets, which could contribute to their chances of an

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early demise. It adds that illegally produced alcoholic beverages are also widely consumed.

- 10 The Kremlin is acutely aware of the epic scale of alcoholism. Ministers call it a "national tragedy". Although President Vladimir Putin has presided over a period of spectacular economic growth since 2000, he has so far not persuaded Russians to drink less. The government has recently cracked down on rogue distillers. Yesterday the federal tax service suspended the licence of several factories producing "alcohol and ethyl alcohol products", saying they had not complied with a law requiring data on how much alcohol each bottle holds.

- 11 Russian alcoholics - drinking perfume, aftershave and cheap local alcohol - face great dangers. In winter, newspapers are invariably full of stories of drunks who have died after falling through icy ponds or collapsing in the snow. According to 2005 figures, Russia has about 2,348,567 registered alcoholics, and alcohol is being linked to 72% of murders and 42% of suicides. The World Health Organisation rates the country as one of the most alcoholic in the world.

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- The city of Izhevsk was chosen for the medical study because...
 - There are more alcoholics there than anywhere else in Russia.
 - Life there is much the same as in other industrial cities in Russia.
 - People there consume products such as eau-de-cologne and antiseptics containing alcohol.
- Life expectancy in Russia decreased during the 1990s because...
 - Alcohol became cheaper after the communist regime fell.
 - President Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign was abandoned during the transition from communism.
 - People became richer so they could afford to buy more alcohol.
- What class of people did the study classify as 'problem drinkers'?
 - People who were prone to binge drinking.
 - People who lost their jobs through drinking.
 - People who drank alcohol not intended for consumption.
- What is the connection between alcohol poisoning and social conditions?
 - People who drink alcohol not intended for consumption often live in poor housing and have bad diets.
 - Household products are widely available in impoverished cities.
 - People die after falling through icy ponds or collapsing in the snow.

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4 Vocabulary 1: Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. A two-word noun phrase meaning *the number of years people normally live*. (para 2)
2. The past participle of a phrasal verb meaning *to prove or show that something is true*. (para 3)
3. A serious disease affecting one of the body's most important organs. (para 3)
4. A phrasal verb meaning *to do something extreme or unpleasant in order to solve a problem*. (para 6)
5. An adjective meaning *dangerous or risky*. (para 8)
6. A noun meaning *an opinion or statement that something is true*. (para 8)
7. A formal word meaning *drinks*. (para 9)
8. A two-word expression meaning *enormous extent*. (para 10)

5 Vocabulary 2: Adjective + noun collocations

Match the adjectives with the nouns to make collocations. Check your answers in the text.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. important | a. diet |
| 2. low | b. alcohol |
| 3. acute | c. growth |
| 4. pure | d. factor |
| 5. high | e. poisoning |
| 6. sharp | f. life expectancy |
| 7. bad | g. level |

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6 Vocabulary 3: Verbs followed by prepositions

Which prepositions follow these verbs?

1. compare _____
2. link _____
3. associate _____
4. resort _____
5. stick _____
6. account _____
7. relate _____
8. contribute _____

7 Discussion

Should alcohol be classified as a dangerous drug? Should its consumption be limited?