

Cologne and antiseptic: Russia's killer drinks

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text.

fluctuation
antiseptic

campaign
abuse

consumption
unorthodox

acute
crack down

binge
trend

1. If the authorities _____ on a particular activity, they take strong action to stop it happening.
2. If something is _____, it does not follow the usual rules.
3. A _____ is an occasion when someone does too much of something they enjoy doing, e.g. drinking alcohol.
4. A _____ is a series of actions intended to achieve social or political change.
5. A _____ is a gradual change or development that produces a particular result.
6. _____ are frequent changes in something, particularly in numbers.
7. An _____ is a substance used to clean injured skin and prevent infections.
8. _____ is the use of food, fuel or drink.
9. If a medical condition is _____, it is extremely serious or severe.
10. _____ is the use of something in a bad, dishonest or harmful way.

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. What percentage of murders in Russia are linked to alcohol?
2. When did President Gorbachev launch his anti-alcohol campaign?
3. How much pure alcohol does the average Russian drink each year?
4. What percentage of suicides in Russia are linked to alcohol?
5. According to the figures from 2004, how long does the average Russian man live?
6. How many men did the scientists study in the city of Izhevsk?

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

- 1 Almost half of the men of working age in Russia who die are killed by alcohol abuse, according to a new medical study which says that large numbers of the country's males die not just because they drink lots of vodka but because they also drink products containing alcohol, such as perfume, antiseptics and medicines. Some products contain 95% alcohol.
- 2 An international group of scientists looked at a single city in the Urals to establish the effects of drinking in Russia. They chose the city of Izhevsk because it is a typical industrial city where life is the same as elsewhere in Russia and where the death rate is the same as the Russian average. The scientists wanted to find out why life expectancy in Russia is so low: in 2004 it was 59 years for men and 72 for women. As a result of the low life expectancy and a low birth rate, the population of Russia is falling by 700,000 a year.
- 3 Alcohol has always been an important factor in death and disease in Russia. This fact is supported by fluctuations in the death rate which are linked to changes in lifestyle and politics, according to a report in the Lancet medical journal. "President Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign in the mid-1980s led to an immediate rise in life expectancy, but the increase in the death rate in the early 1990s during the transition from communism was probably the result of increased alcohol consumption. Deaths related to alcohol, such as acute alcohol poisoning and liver disease, showed the greatest fluctuations, and there were similar trends for other causes that were probably 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 often went on binges, meaning two or more days of continuous drunkenness.
- 5 Experts from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine examined records and interviewed the families of 1,750 men who had died in Izhevsk from 2003-05. They compared these men 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 perfume and other unorthodox sources - they were nine times more likely to die.
- 6 The authors say that men living in poverty after losing a job through drinking may be forced to drink household products containing pure alcohol. Among those who were still alive, 47% who drank products like these were out of work compared with 13% who drank only vodka and beer. Overall, 43% of deaths of men aged 25 to 54 were caused by alcohol in Izhevsk. The authors say these high levels could be caused by drinking household products with very high levels of alcohol, as well as binges.
- 7 "Almost half of all deaths in working-age men in a typical Russian city may be caused by hazardous drinking," they write. "Our analyses provide indirect support for the argument that the sharp fluctuations seen in the death rate in Russia in the early 1990s could be related to dangerous drinking or people drinking alcohol from household products."
- 8 A separate commentary points out that people who get their alcohol from household products often live in poor housing and have bad diets, and this could contribute to their chances of an early death. The commentary adds that many people also drink illegally produced alcoholic drinks.

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9 The Russian government admits that alcoholism is a huge problem. Ministers call it a "national tragedy". Although President Vladimir Putin's government has seen a period of spectacular economic growth since 2000, he has not been able to persuade Russians to drink less. The government has recently cracked down on people producing alcohol illegally.

10 Russian alcoholics - drinking perfume, aftershave and cheap local alcohol - face great

dangers. In winter, newspapers are always full of stories of drunks who have died after falling through ice or collapsing in the snow. According to 2005 figures, Russia has about 2,348,567 registered alcoholics, and alcohol is linked to 72% of murders and 42% of suicides. The World Health Organisation says Russia is one of the most alcoholic countries in the world.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements *True (T)* or *False (F)* according to the text?

1. Russians drink more alcohol than anyone else in the world.
2. People drinking alcohol from household products are more likely to die young than other users of alcohol.
3. Poor housing and bad diets force people to drink household products like perfume and aftershave.
4. The city of Izhevsk was chosen for the study because it has a very high rate of alcoholism.
5. The Russian government does not regard alcoholism as a problem.
6. Newspapers rarely report stories about drunks dying in cold weather.

4 Vocabulary 1: Find the word

Look in the text and find the following words and expressions.

1. A noun meaning *man*. (para 1)
2. A two-word expression meaning *the length of time that someone is likely to live*. (para 2)
3. A noun meaning *the process of changing from one form or state to another*. (para 3)
4. A two-word expression meaning *based on calculations that show the average amount for each person affected*. (para 3)
5. An adjective meaning *relating to homes or used in homes*. (para 6)
6. An adjective meaning *dangerous or risky*. (para 7)
7. An adjective meaning *extremely impressive*. (para 9)
8. A verb meaning *to fall down suddenly and become ill or unconscious*. (para 10)

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5 Vocabulary 2: Collocations

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to form collocations.

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. birth | a. disease |
| 2. life | b. level |
| 3. liver | c. factor |
| 4. high | d. alcohol |
| 5. bad | e. rate |
| 6. important | f. diet |
| 7. pure | g. danger |
| 8. great | h. expectancy |

6 Vocabulary 3: Word building

Complete the table.

verb	noun
1. grow	
2. fluctuate	
3. consume	
4. argue	
5. contribute	
6. comment	
7. persuade	
8. abuse	

7 Discussion

Excessive alcohol consumption is a problem in many parts of the world. What are the possible solutions?