

Know About Alcohol and Cancer Risk

Information for patients and families

Read this resource to learn:

- How alcohol increases your risk of cancer
- How you can lower your risk of getting cancer
- How you can reduce the amount of alcohol you drink
- Where to find help, treatment and support
- Where to find more information on alcohol and cancer risk





How does alcohol increase your risk of cancer?

Alcohol is a carcinogen (cancer-causing agent). Your risk of cancer grows the more you drink and if you drink for a long time.

If you drink alcohol, you increase your risk of getting:

- Head and neck cancer
- Esophageal cancer (cancer in the tube that goes from your throat to your stomach)
- Liver cancer
- Breast cancer
- Colorectal cancer (higher risk for men)

Alcohol may increase the risk of getting other cancers too.

But there is not much known yet about drinking alcohol and the risk of getting other cancers.

Alcohol is found in drinks like:

- Beers, coolers and ciders
- Wines
- Liquors (gin, rum, vodka, whiskey)



How can you lower your risk of getting cancer?

1. There is no safe level for drinking alcohol. Even small amounts of alcohol can increase your risk of cancer.

If you drink alcohol, you can reduce your risk by keeping it to:

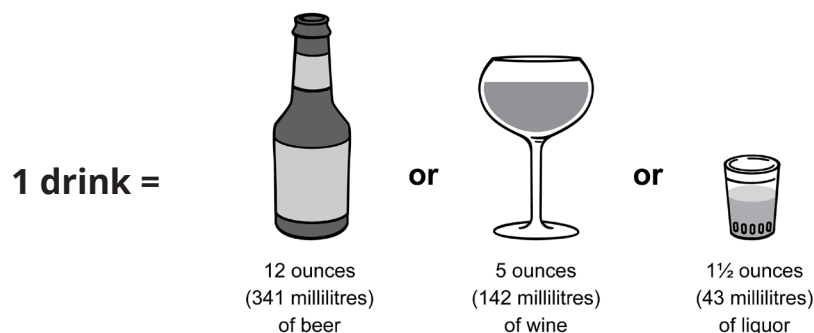
- 1 drink a day or less for women
- 2 drinks a day or less for men

Examples of one drink are:

- One 341 mL (12 ounce) bottle of beer (5 percent alcohol)
- One 142 mL (5 ounce) glass of wine (10 to 12 percent alcohol)
- One 43 mL (1.5 ounce) shot of liquor (40 percent alcohol)

You can find the exact amount of alcohol in a drink by reading the bottle or container label.

2. Reduce the amount you smoke. Smoking and drinking together will increase you risk of cancer more than smoking and drinking on their own.





How can you reduce the amount of alcohol you drink?

If you want to reduce the amount of alcohol you drink, here are some tips for doing so:

- Drink water before and while you drink alcohol. This will help you feel full so you drink less alcohol.
- Do not eat salty snacks (like chips) while you drink alcohol. Salty snacks will make you feel thirsty and cause you to drink more alcohol. Drink water instead if you get thirsty.
- Have only one drink an hour.
- Measure your alcohol when you pour drinks at home to make it easier to track how much you drink.
- Buy small drinking glasses for the house instead of large ones. This will make it easier to drink smaller amounts at a time.
- If you drink alcohol to help you relax, try to find other ways to relax:
 - Take walks
 - Listen to music
 - Write in a diary
- Track how much you drink and when. This will make it easier to know how much alcohol you drink.
- Set goals that you can keep. For example, try not to drink alcohol more than two days a week.
- Plan how much you will drink ahead of time. For example, when you have dinner with a friend, plan to stop drinking alcohol after 2 glasses. This will make it easier for you control how much alcohol you drink.



Where to find help, treatment and support for people with alcohol use problems

[Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#)

Addiction Medicine Service provides medical and counselling services for alcohol and other substance dependence:

CAMH contact 416-535-8501, press 2
Location: CAMH Bell Gateway Building (BGB)
100 Stokes Street, 3rd Floor, Toronto, ON M6J 1H4
For all other Addiction Medicine Service inquiries:
Phone: 416 535 8501, ext. 36019

[Ontario Drug and Alcohol Helpline](#) (open 24/7)

Includes phone, chat, and email health service information:

- <http://www.drugandalcoholhelpline.ca>
- Toll-free: 1 800 565 8603

Remember:

- Alcohol increases the risk of head and neck, esophageal, liver, breast, and colorectal cancer.
- If you drink alcohol, reduce your risk. Do not drink more than 1 drink a day or less for women and 2 drinks a day or less for men.



Where to find more information

For more information on alcohol and cancer risk, please refer to these resources:

[Canadian Cancer Society](#)

[National Cancer Institute](#)

[Cancer Research UK](#)

[Irish Cancer Society](#)

[Cancer Care Ontario](#)

[World Cancer Research Fund](#)

[Oral Cancer Foundation](#)

Sources

Canadian Cancer Society. Alcohol [Internet]. [Place unknown]: Canadian Cancer Society; 2015 [cited 2015 June 9] Available from: <http://www.cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-101/what-is-a-risk-factor/alcohol/?region=on>

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National Cancer Institute. Alcohol and Cancer Risk. [Internet]. [Place unknown]: from National Cancer Institute; 2015 [updated 2013 June 24; cited 2015 June 9] Available from: <http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/alcohol/alcohol-fact-sheet>

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