

The facts about Alcohol and Chronic Disease

Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guideline for Chronic Disease (The Limits)

Over time, even moderate drinking can increase your risk of some chronic diseases, including high blood pressure, depression and many forms of cancer. To reduce your long-term health risks, follow these guidelines:

Women: 0 to 2 drinks a day, up to 10 drinks a week

Men: 0 to 3 drinks a day, up to 15 drinks a week

1 Starting to drink, or drinking more, will not improve your health.

Drinking alcohol is associated with a number of serious health problems. Over time, even moderate drinking can increase your risk of some chronic diseases, including heart disease, many forms of cancer, depression, liver cirrhosis and high blood pressure. As a person's average weekly consumption of alcohol increases, so does the chance of facing these illnesses.

Heart Disease

You may have heard that alcohol is good for your heart. If you are age 45 or older, it's true that small amounts of alcohol (between one half and one drink per day) can lower the risk of some forms of heart disease and diabetes. However, you lose any health benefits if you have heavy drinking episodes and drink more than the recommended daily limit, even once in a while.

If you really want to have an impact on your heart health, you're better off eating a healthy diet, being physically active, and becoming smoke-free.

Cancer

Drinking any amount of alcohol increases your risk for many types of cancer including breast, mouth, throat, colon, and liver cancer. Your risk of getting some kinds of cancer increases when you drink as little as one drink per day. The more you drink, the more your risk increases.

The risk of cancer increases regardless of what type of alcohol you drink (beer, wine, cider, spirits, and liqueur).

Combining smoking with alcohol increases cancer risks even greater than the cancer risks that come from drinking alcohol or smoking on their own.

When it comes to cancer risk, alcohol should be avoided.

How to use the guidelines

Stay within your weekly limit:

Women: up to 10 drinks a week
Men: up to 15 drinks a week

Do not drink your weekly limit on the weekend. Even if you drink heavily once in a while, it increases your risk of injury and long-term health problems.

Have a couple of non-drinking days each week. This will help you avoid developing a drinking habit.

Once in a while...

Once in a while you might have an extra drink:

Women: no more than 3 drinks

Men: no more than 4 drinks.

If you have an extra drink, you should still stay within your weekly limit.

2 If you are a woman...

Alcohol puts women at greater risk for certain alcohol-related illnesses such as breast cancer, stroke, diabetes, high blood pressure and liver disease. For example, at even one drink per day, a female's risk of getting liver cirrhosis increases by 139% compared with 26% for males.

Women are more vulnerable to alcohol risks because women, on average, weigh less than men and smaller people reach higher blood alcohol levels than larger people. Kilogram for

kilogram, women also have less water in their bodies than men do. Even if a woman and a man of the same weight drink an equal amount of alcohol, the woman's blood alcohol concentration will be higher. Finally, women have less alcohol metabolizing enzymes and digest alcohol in their stomach differently than men.

Women should drink less alcohol than men.

3 The bottom line

There is no level of drinking alcohol that is completely risk-free. To reduce the risks, follow Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.

Talk to your health care provider...

- about your family history for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and how alcohol can affect these and other health conditions
- if you are drinking more than the low risk drinking guidelines
- if you are concerned about why you are drinking alcohol
- if you are having bad experiences as a result of drinking alcohol.

If you have a physical or mental illness...

Alcohol has a much greater effect on people with physical or mental illnesses. Alcohol can affect the illness itself or the medications used to treat it.

If you have been diagnosed with a physical or mental illness, talk with your health care provider to find out if drinking alcohol creates any added risks.

For more information...

If you want more information, or if you need some extra support, talk to a health care provider. This could be your doctor or a nurse.

If you have concerns about how much you are drinking, contact your local Addiction Services office. To find the one nearest you, go to: <http://www.addictionservices.ns.ca/>