**Tips for drinking less**

- Set limits for yourself and then stick to them.
- Aim to have at least 2 alcohol free days per week.
- Try refreshing non-alcoholic drinks – mineral water with lemon, lime and soda water etc.
- Try low-alcohol or no-alcohol alternatives such as light beer or non-alcoholic beer.
- Use standard drinks to monitor how much alcohol you drink. By converting what you drink into standard drinks, it is easier to keep track.
- Drink slowly: Take sips and not gulps. Put your glass down between sips.
- Eat before you drink or while you are drinking: Eating slows your drinking pace and fills you up.
- Avoid salty snacks: Salty food like chips make you thirsty, so you drink more.
- Avoid ‘rounds’: Drink at your own pace, not someone else’s. If you do participate in rounds, include some non-alcoholic drinks.
- Finish one drink at a time: If people top up your drink it can be hard to keep track of how much alcohol you have consumed.

**Recommendations**

There is no safe level of alcohol when it comes to cancer.

If you choose to drink alcohol, drink no more than 2 standard drinks a day, and have alcohol-free days.

**How do we know?**

Information in this brochure is from the following references:


**What can I do?**

- Stop smoking
- Move your body
- Stay in shape
- Eat for health
- Be SunSmart
- Avoid alcohol
- Talk to your doctor about cancer

For support and information on cancer and cancer-related issues, call Cancer Council Helpline.
This is a confidential service. Available Statewide for the cost of a local call Monday to Friday 8 am – 6 pm.

Reduce your risk of cancer
Drinking alcohol increases your risk of cancer

Drinking alcohol is a cause of cancer. There is now convincing evidence that alcohol can lead to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, bowel (in men and breast. There is also probable evidence that alcohol increases the risk of bowel cancer (in women) and liver cancer. It is estimated that 5,070 cases of cancer (or 5% of all cancers) are due to alcohol use each year in Australia.

When it comes to cancer risk, there is no safe level of alcohol consumption. Even small amounts of alcohol increase your risk of cancer. The more you drink and the more often you drink, the greater your risk.

The world-leading cancer agency – the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) – has classified alcoholic drinks and the chemical present in these drinks (ethanol) as a Group 1 carcinogen.

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So what should I do?

To reduce your cancer risk, Cancer Council WA recommends you limit how much alcohol you drink, or better still, avoid drinking alcohol altogether.

If you choose to drink, it is recommended you drink within National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) guidelines, which advise no more than 2 standard drinks a day (for men and women).

If you choose to drink, we also recommend that you avoid binge drinking (drinking more than 4 standard drinks on a single occasion), and aim to have at least two alcohol-free days every week.

What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol. All bottles, cans and casks of alcohol sold in Australia are required to state on the label the approximate number of standard drinks they contain. You can use this information to estimate how much alcohol you are drinking.

It is important to know that different types of alcoholic drinks contain different amounts of alcohol.

Other negative effects of alcohol

Drinking alcohol has a number of negative effects other than increasing cancer risk. Other health effects from risky alcohol drinking include damage to the liver, heart and brain, high blood pressure and stroke, and risks to unborn babies. Drinking alcohol at a young age can affect brain development and lead to alcohol-related problems in later life.

Drinking alcohol is also associated with injury, violence, crime and motor vehicle accidents.

But isn’t alcohol good for my heart?

Previously, researchers believed that red wine had health benefits for heart disease. It now seems that the research on alcohol and heart disease overestimated the benefits. The World Health Organization and the Heart Foundation now say that there is no merit in promoting alcohol consumption as a preventive strategy.

There are other more effective ways to decrease your risk of heart disease, such as being physically active, having a healthy body weight, following a healthy diet and quitting smoking.

Does drinking matter if I smoke?

The combined effects of smoking and drinking alcohol are much greater than the individual risks from either smoking or drinking alcohol alone. This is because alcohol makes it easier for the mouth and throat to absorb the cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco.

Those who drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes have a much higher chance of getting head and neck cancers (cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx and oesophagus). In fact, the combination of drinking and smoking is thought to be responsible for more than 75% of cancers of the head and neck.

Can alcohol lead to weight gain?

Just like any food or drink you consume (except water), alcoholic drinks contain energy (kilojoules, kJ). In fact, alcohol contains few nutrients but is very energy dense. The energy found in alcohol is often called ‘empty kilojoules’. In Australia, one standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol, which gives you 290kJ of energy. If mixed with other sugary drinks (mixers), it contains even more energy.

When alcohol is added to your diet it can easily contribute to weight gain. Being overweight is a risk factor for some types of cancer including oesophagus, pancreas, bowel, breast (after menopause), kidney and endometrium (lining of the uterus). So drinking alcohol increases cancer risk, and gaining weight can add to this cancer risk.

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