

Cancer & Alcohol Use

Good news about cancer

The good news is that persons can reduce their risk for some types of cancers, such as mouth, esophagus, breast, liver and colon, by reducing their alcohol use.

If you choose to drink, follow the *U.S. Dietary Guidelines*, which recommend up to **1 drink per day for women** and up to **2 drinks per day for men**.

People who shouldn't drink alcohol include:

- Children and adolescents
- Women who are pregnant or may become pregnant
 - Persons with certain medical conditions
- Individuals taking prescription or over-the-counter medications that can interact with alcohol
 - Persons recovering from alcoholism
- Individuals who cannot limit their drinking to low levels
- Persons who plan to drive, operate machinery, or other activities that require skill & attention

The Relationship Between Alcohol Use & Cancer

- In 1988, alcohol was declared a cancer causing agent by the World Health Organization.¹
- Alcohol consumption has been shown to contribute to cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, colon-rectum, liver, and female breast.¹
- Alcohol intake has also been significantly associated with pancreatic cancer.²
- In 2009, alcohol consumption resulted in an estimated 18,200 to 21,300 cancer deaths, or 3.2% to 3.7% of all US cancer deaths. Alcohol-attributable cancers resulted in 17.0 to 19.1 years of potential life lost for each death.³
- In 2014, the WHO reported that when it comes to cancer, no amount of alcohol is safe to drink.²
- The evidence for the harmful effects of alcohol is stronger than the evidence for its beneficial effects.⁴

Alcohol as a Risk Factor

- The more alcohol that a person drinks, the higher their cancer risk.^{5,6}
- Smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol is particularly dangerous. It increases the risk for cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus.⁴ Individuals who are both heavy drinkers and heavy smokers have the highest risks of these cancers.⁵
- Avoiding cigarettes and alcohol could prevent up to 80% of oral cancer cases and 90% of laryngeal cancer cases.⁴

What can be done?

Individuals

- When it comes to cancer, there is no safe amount of alcohol.
- For healthy individuals who do choose to drink alcohol, their cancer risk can be reduced by following the *Dietary Guidelines*:⁷
 - **For Women: no more than 1 drink per day**
 - **For Men: no more than 2 drinks per day for men.**

Healthcare Providers

- Alcohol screening and brief clinical interventions in health care settings can successfully and cost-effectively reduce alcohol consumption.⁸
- Many alcohol screening tools are available. Behavior change and positive effects have been observed in adolescents, adults, older adults, and pregnant women following alcohol screening and brief interventions aimed at reducing alcohol intake.^{9,10}

Policymakers

- Implement effective strategies to reduce alcohol use recommended by the Community Guide:¹¹
 - Regulate alcohol outlet density
 - Enforce commercial host liability
 - Increase the alcohol excise tax
 - Maintain limits on the days and hours of sale

Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention Resources

For implementing alcohol screenings in primary care settings, visit:^{12,13}

www.cdc.gov/ncbdd/alcoholsbiimplementationguide.pdf

www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspdrin.htm

For implementing alcohol screenings in trauma centers, visit:¹⁴

www.cdc.gov/injuryresponse/alcohol-screening/pdf/sbi-implementation-guide-a.pdf

Created by the Alcohol Epidemiology Program, Michigan Department of Community Health.

For more information on excessive alcohol use, please visit: www.michigan.gov/substanceabuseepi

For more information on cancer, please visit: www.michigan.gov/cancer

References

1. Alcohol drinking. IARC Working Group, Lyon, 13-20 October 1987. IARC Monogr Eval Carcinog Risks Hum. 1988;44:1-378.
2. Rehm J, Shield K. Alcohol consumption. In: Stewart BW, Wild CB, eds. World Cancer Report 2014. Lyon, France: International Agency for Research on Cancer; 2014.
3. Nelson DE et al. Alcohol-Attributable Cancer Deaths and Years of Potential Life Lost in the United States. Am J Public Health. 2013 April; 103(4): 641–648.
4. Stokowski LA. No Amount of Alcohol Is Safe. Medscape. Apr 30, 2014.
5. American Cancer Society. Alcohol Use and Cancer. Available at: <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancercauses/dietandphysicalactivity/alcohol-use-and-cancer>. Accessed on: July 11, 2014.
6. National Cancer Institute. Alcohol and Cancer Risk. Available at: <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/alcohol>. Accessed on: July 11, 2014
7. U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In: *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, 2010. Chapter 3 – Foods and Food Components to Reduce [PDF 967 KB]. 7th Edition, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office; 2010, p. 30–32.
8. American Public Health Association and Education Development Center, Inc. Alcohol screening and brief intervention: a guide for public health practitioners. Washington DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, US Department of Transportation; 2008. http://www.apha.org/NR/rdoonlyres/B03B4514-CCBA-47B9-82B0-5FEB4D2DC983/0/SBImanualfinal4_16.pdf Accessed April 7, 2014.
9. Babor T, Caetano R, Casswell S, et al. Alcohol: No Ordinary Commodity. Research and Public Policy. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press; 2010.
10. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse: Recommendation Statement. AHRQ Publication No. 12-05171-EF-3. Available at: <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf12/alc misuse/alc misuserfinalrs.htm>. Accessed on: July 11, 2014.
11. Community Preventive Services Task Force. Preventing excessive alcohol consumption. In: The guide to community preventive services. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2005. Available at <http://www.thecommunityguide.org/alcohol/index.html>.
12. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Planning and Implementing Screening and Brief Intervention for Risky Alcohol Use: A Step-by-Step Guide for Primary Care Practices*. Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, 2014.
13. Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse, Topic Page. U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. <http://www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/uspstf/uspdrin.htm>
14. Higgins-Biddle J, Hungerford D, Cates-Wessel K. Screening and Brief Interventions (SBI) for Unhealthy Alcohol Use: A Step-By-Step Implementation Guide for Trauma Centers. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control; 2009. Available at: www.cdc.gov/injuryresponse/alcohol-screening/pdf/sbi-implementation-guide-a.pdf