

# Alcohol and cancer prevention



**There is convincing evidence that drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the bowel, breast, mouth, throat, voice box, oesophagus (food pipe) and liver. Even drinking small amounts of alcohol increases your cancer risk. The more you drink, the greater the risk. If you choose to drink, limit your intake.**

## Types of alcohol and cancer risk

The type of alcohol you drink doesn't make any difference. Beer, wine and spirits all increase your risk of cancer.

## Other health problems and alcohol

Heavy use of alcohol is linked to many health problems such as cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, alcohol dependence, stroke, suicide, injury and car accidents.

Even at low intake, alcohol contains a lot of energy (kilojoules or calories) so it can easily contribute to weight gain. Being overweight or obese also increases your cancer risk.

## Alcohol and heart disease

In the past, researchers believed red wine might have had health benefits for heart disease, but this does not appear to be the case.

There are better things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease as well as cancer, such as not smoking, healthy eating, being physically active and maintaining a healthy bodyweight. It is important to look at the risks and benefits of drinking alcohol for you personally.

## Smoking and alcohol

It has been known for a long time that smoking is harmful to health. The combined effects of smoking and alcohol greatly increase the risk of cancer (more so than from either of these factors alone). Up to 75 per cent of cancers of the upper airway and digestive tract can be related to alcohol plus smoking.

## What should I do?

To reduce your risk of cancer, if you don't drink, don't start. If you choose to drink:

- Limit your intake.
- For men – no more than two standard drinks a day.
- For women – no more than one standard drink a day.
- Avoid binge drinking. Do not "save" your drinks using alcohol-free days, only to consume them in one session.

- Have at least two alcohol-free days every week.
- Choose low alcohol drinks.
- Eat some food when you drink.

**Remember, if you have any concerns or questions, please contact your doctor.**



### One standard drink =

100ml wine (1 bottle = 7 standard drinks)

285ml (1 middy) of full strength beer

425ml (1 schooner) of low alcohol beer

30ml (1 nip) of spirits

60ml (2 nips) of sherry

220-250ml alcoholic soda (2/3 bottle).

Cocktails may contain more than three standard drinks!

## Ways to reduce your cancer risk

### How do you stack up?

*(Tick if you need to take action)*

- ☐ Quit smoking
- ☐ Be SunSmart
- ☐ Maintain a healthy body weight
- ☐ Be more physically active
- ☐ Eat a healthy, well balanced diet
- ☐ Avoid or limit alcohol intake

## Where can I get reliable information?

**Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20**

Information and support for you and your family for the cost of a local call anywhere in Australia.

**Cancer Council Australia website**

(with links to state and territory Cancer Councils)

**[www.cancer.org.au](http://www.cancer.org.au)**