

ALCOHOL AND YOUR HEALTH

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Alcoholic beverages supply calories but few nutrients. Alcoholic beverages are harmful when consumed in excess, and some people should not drink at all. Excess alcohol alters judgment and can lead to dependency and a great many other serious health problems. Taking more than one drink per day for women or two drinks per day for men can raise the risk for motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, high blood pressure, stroke, violence, suicide, and certain types of cancer. Even one drink per day can slightly raise the risk of breast cancer. Alcohol consumption during pregnancy increases risk of birth defects. Too much alcohol may cause social and psychological problems, cirrhosis of the liver, inflammation of the pancreas, and damage to the brain and heart. Heavy drinkers also are at risk of malnutrition because alcohol contains calories that may substitute for those in nutritious foods. If adults choose to drink alcoholic beverages, they should consume them only in moderation and with meals to slow alcohol absorption.

What is Drinking in Moderation?

No more than one drink per day for women

No more than two drinks per day for men

This limit is based on differences between the sexes in both weight and metabolism.

One Drink = 12 ounces of regular beer (150 calories)
5 ounces of wine (100 calories)
1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirit (100 calories)



NOTE: Even moderate drinking provides extra calories

Drinking in moderation may lower risk for coronary heart disease, mainly among men over age 45 and women over age 55. However, there are other factors that reduce the risk of heart disease, including a healthy diet, physical activity, avoidance of smoking, and maintenance of a healthy weight.

Moderate consumption provides little, if any, health benefit for younger people. Risk of alcohol abuse increases when drinking starts at an early age. Some studies suggest that older people may become more sensitive to the effects of alcohol as they age.

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WHO SHOULD NOT DRINK?

Some people should not drink alcoholic beverages at all.



- * **Children and adolescents.**
- * **Individuals of any age who cannot restrict their drinking to moderate levels.** This is a special concern for recovering alcoholics, problem drinkers, and people whose family members have alcohol problems.



- * **Women who may become pregnant or who are pregnant.** A safe level of alcohol intake has not been established for women at any time during pregnancy, including the first few weeks. Major birth defects, including fetal alcohol syndrome, can be caused by heavy drinking by the pregnant mother. Other fetal alcohol effects may occur at lower levels.
- * **Individuals who plan to drive, operate machinery, or take part in other activities that require attention, skill, or coordination.** Most people retain some alcohol in the blood up to 2 or 3 hours after a single drink.

- * **Individuals taking prescription or over-the-counter medications that can interact with alcohol.** Alcohol alters the effectiveness or toxicity of many medications, and some medication may increase blood alcohol levels. If you take medications, ask your health care provider for advice about alcohol intake, especially if you are an older adult.



ADVICE FOR TODAY

- * **If you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, do so sensibly, and in moderation.**
- * **Limit intake to one drink per day for women or two per day for men, and take with meals to slow alcohol absorption.**
- * **Avoid drinking before or when driving, or whenever it puts you or others at risk.**