

Alcohol Advice for Cancer Survivors



This fact sheet is one in a series developed for cancer survivors who have finished active treatment. Eating well and maintaining a healthy weight may help lower the chances of some cancers returning and improve overall health.

Limiting alcohol may decrease the risk of cancer recurrence. This is because alcohol not only is a risk factor for some cancers, such as head, neck and breast cancers, but it also contributes to weight gain. Excess weight is linked to poor health including cancer. Keeping to a healthy weight is an important part of maintaining overall health.

How does alcohol affect weight?

Alcohol contains a lot of kilojoules (calories) so can contribute to weight gain. When you drink alcohol you become less aware of the food you are eating. This can lead to overeating. You may also have alcohol in an environment where there aren't many healthy food options, for example at a party or in the pub.

Why else should I limit alcohol?

Heavy use of alcohol can cause short-term and long-term health problems such as cirrhosis of the liver and stroke. It can also lead to behavioural changes, injury and car accidents.

But isn't alcohol good for my heart?

The existing evidence does not justify the promotion of alcohol such as red wine to prevent heart disease. The research that previously found a role in alcohol reducing heart disease seems to have overestimated its protective effect.

What are the recommendations?

Cancer Council NSW recommends that to reduce their risk of cancer, people need to limit their consumption of alcohol. If you choose to drink, you should not have more than two standard drinks a day, and you should have at least one day a week without any alcohol.

What is a "standard drink"?

- 100 mL wine (therefore one bottle contains approximately seven standard drinks)
- 285 mL (one middy) full strength beer
- 450 mL (one schooner) low alcohol/light beer
- 220–250 mL alcoholic soda
- 60 mL sherry
- 30 mL spirits
- Some cocktails contain more than three drinks.

tips

How can I drink less?

- Switch to light beer
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with water, juice or soft drinks
- Use water to quench thirst and sip alcoholic drinks slowly
- Drink wine spritzers (wine with soda water or mineral water)
- Try a few alcohol-free days each week
- Wait until your wine glass is empty before topping it up, to help you keep count of your drinks
- Reduce salty snacks so you don't get thirsty
- Nominate to be the driver if you're going out
- Suggest that your friends or partner drink less as well, or ask them not to pressure you into drinking more
- Try some tasty non-alcoholic drink recipes (see overleaf). Make these at home or prepare them at a friend's place instead of taking wine or beer to a function.



Alcohol Advice

Non-alcoholic drink recipes

Raspberry Frappe

- 1 packet frozen raspberries
- 500 mL lemonade or soda water

Blend ingredients together in a food processor and serve in tall glasses. You may need to do a couple of batches depending on the size of your processor.

Punch

- 750 mL mineral water
- 750 mL ginger ale
- 500 mL fruit juice
- 1 tin stewed fruit
- 1 passionfruit
- 6 strawberries cut into quarters

Chill all ingredients thoroughly. Place fruit in a large punch bowl and then add the drinks and stir through before serving.

Fresh lemonade

- 250 mL lemon juice
- 500 mL water
- 155 g caster sugar
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced

Combine lemon juice, water and sugar in a medium saucepan over low heat. Stir gently for five minutes or until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Transfer to a jug and add the sliced lemon. Serve when chilled, straining the lemon slices as you pour.

This fact sheet provides general information only and is not a substitute for individual health advice. You should talk to your doctor or dietitian about your specific situation.

Cancer Council NSW 153 Dowling Street,
Woolloomooloo NSW 2011

Email feedback@nswcc.org.au

© Cancer Council NSW 2012. **ABN** 51 116 463 846

