

Drink less alcohol

Reduce your cancer risk



**For information & support, call
13 11 20 or visit cancercouncil.com.au**

Reducing your cancer risk

A healthy lifestyle can prevent one third of cancers. To reduce your risk of cancer, Cancer Council NSW recommends these lifestyle choices:

- **Limit drinking alcohol**
- Limit red meat and avoid processed meat
- Eat at least 5 serves of vegetables and 2 serves of fruit each day
- Eat a variety of wholegrain, wholemeal and high-fibre foods, such as bread, pasta, oats, rice, legumes (beans, peas and lentils) and nuts
- Move more, sit less and be active for at least 30 minutes each day
- Be a healthy body weight
- Avoid high-kilojoule foods and sugary drinks to prevent weight gain
- Choose foods low in salt
- Don't smoke and avoid other people's smoke
- Protect your skin from the sun
- If you can, breastfeed your baby for at least 6 months

Q: Does drinking alcohol increase cancer risk?

Drinking alcohol is a risk factor for seven types of cancer, including:

- cancer of the mouth and throat (pharynx and larynx)
- oesophagus
- bowel
- stomach
- liver
- breast.

The risk of some cancer types is even higher for people who drink and smoke.

About 3200 cases of cancer diagnosed each year in Australian adults can be attributed to drinking alcohol.

Alcohol contains a lot of energy (kilojoules or calories) so it can contribute to weight gain. Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for many types of cancer including bowel, breast (after menopause), endometrium, kidney, pancreas, liver and oesophagus.

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in Australian women. While you cannot change some of the risk factors for breast cancer, drinking less alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight are changes you can make to reduce your risk.

Q: How does alcohol increase cancer risk?

Researchers are still investigating how alcohol causes cancer. However, there are several possible reasons:

- Alcoholic drinks contain ethanol, which irritates cells in the body, particularly the mouth and throat. Over a long period, even with moderate drinking, this cell irritation can lead to cancer.
- Alcohol causes cirrhosis of the liver, which is a risk factor for liver cancer.
- Alcohol increases oestrogen levels, which is linked to breast cancer.
- When alcohol is digested it breaks down into compounds that can cause cancer.

Q: Is it true alcohol is good for my heart?

While some studies suggest drinking alcohol in moderation keeps your heart healthy, the evidence is not as strong as once thought.

There are other ways to reduce your risk of heart disease, such as eating well, exercising regularly and not smoking. These habits also reduce your risk of cancer.

Q: How much can I drink?

Cancer Council recommends you drink less alcohol to reduce your risk of cancer.

If you choose to drink, follow the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines and have no more than 2 standard drinks a day to reduce your lifetime risk of harm. Have some alcohol-free days each week.

If you are planning a pregnancy, pregnant and/or breastfeeding, or are under 18 years of age, it is safest not to drink alcohol.

ONE STANDARD DRINK contains 10 grams of alcohol and is equal to:

- 100 mL of wine (one bottle of wine contains about 7 standard drinks)
- 30 mL (one nip) of spirits
- 60 mL (two nips) of sherry
- 285 mL (one middy) of full strength beer
- 450 mL (one schooner) of low strength beer
- 220–250 mL ready-to-drink alcoholic sodas (around $\frac{2}{3}$ bottle)
- 200 mL cider

Some cocktails contain more than three standard drinks.

Drinks served at home and at restaurants and bars usually contain more than one standard drink.

Standard drinks guide

Beer



1.1
285 mL
Full strength
4.8% Alc. Vol



1.6
425 mL
Full strength
4.8% Alc. Vol



1.4
375 mL
Full strength
4.8% Alc. Vol



1.4
375 mL
Full strength
4.8% Alc. Vol

Wine



1.6
150 mL
Average restaurant
serving of red wine
13.5% Alc. Vol



1.4
150 mL
Average restaurant
serving of white wine
11.5% Alc. Vol



1.4
150 mL
Average restaurant
serving of
sparkling wine
12% Alc. Vol

Spirits



1
30 mL
High strength
spirit nip
40% Alc. Vol



1.2
330 mL
Full strength
ready-to-drink
5% Alc. Vol



1.5
375 mL
Full strength
pre-mixed spirit
5% Alc. Vol

HOW TO CUT DOWN ON ALCOHOL



- Choose a non-alcoholic drink such as sparkling mineral water with fresh lemon or lime slices.
- Use water to quench thirst.
- Sip alcoholic drinks slowly.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with a glass of water.
- Set yourself a limit and stop once you've reached it.
- Wait until your glass is empty before topping it up to keep count of your drinks.
- Switch to low alcohol drinks, dilute spirits with extra mixer and ice, or have a spritzer or shandy (wine or beer mixed with soda or mineral water).
- Have some alcohol-free days each week.
- Eat while you drink to slow your drinking pace.
- Avoid salty snacks that make you thirsty.
- Catch up with friends for a coffee rather than an alcoholic drink.
- Meet friends to play cricket, tennis or go bushwalking rather than going to clubs and pubs.



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Drinking alcohol, even small amounts, increases the risk of cancer, and the risk increases with every drink you have. The type of alcohol you drink – wine, beer or spirits – doesn't make any difference to cancer risk.

SEE THE OTHER BROCHURES IN THIS SERIES

- Eat fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and fibre
- Eat less red and processed meat
- Be physically active
- Be a healthy weight

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