

Alcohol In Moderation

Many people enjoy drinking alcohol, and it may have a place in cultural and family traditions. Most people usually do it safely. But it's important to remember that drinking alcohol is not risk-free.

If you choose to drink alcohol, the key is to keep your intake at the lowest levels possible to reduce your risk of harm.

Alcohol and You

Alcohol is a depressant that impacts the whole body, including the central nervous system (the brain, cardiovascular system (the heart), and respiratory system (the lungs and breathing)). When someone drinks too much alcohol or too quickly, it can overwhelm or suppress the healthy performance of these systems in the body. This can lead to a person passing out or having alcohol poisoning which includes symptoms such as vomiting, throwing up while passed out, not waking up after throwing up, not responding when being talked to or shouted at, fast heart rate, and other symptoms which are found by [searching Alcohol Poisoning on MyHealthAlberta.ca](#).



What are the health risks associated with drinking alcohol?

When you drink alcohol, you may be putting your health and safety at risk. Your risk of harm increases with each drink that you have.

Drinking alcohol may:

- Harm your liver, pancreas, nervous system, heart, and brain.
- Cause high blood pressure, depression, stomach problems, or sexual problems.
- Contribute to the development of some cancers, such as cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, colon, and breast.
- Cause memory loss and affect your ability to think, learn, and reason.

- Cause harm to your developing baby (fetus) if you drink during pregnancy.
- Lead to problems at work, school, or home.
- Increase the risk of car crashes and violent behaviour.
- Cause you to develop an alcohol use problem.

Using alcohol or other substances can affect your health, work, school, and relationships. It can change how well you make decisions and control your actions, how you think, and how quickly you can react. Alcohol patterns may vary. Some people drink large amounts of alcohol at specific times, such as on the weekend. Others may be sober for long periods and then go on a drinking binge that lasts for weeks or months. Some people drink and may be intoxicated every day.

If you think you are drinking too much, you may want to seek help. Talk to your doctor about whether you need to withdraw from alcohol under medical care.

What can you do?

Less is best! Research shows that drinking any amount of alcohol can have risks. Canadian health experts say your risk of harm from alcohol is:

- **Low** if you have two standard drinks or less per week
- **Moderate** if you have between three and six drinks per week
- **High** if you have seven or more drinks per week

Having more than two drinks in one sitting increases your risk of harm to yourself and others. Keep in mind that age, sex, weight, and health history can cause alcohol to impact people differently.

In Canada, a standard drink is equal to:

- A bottle of beer (12 oz., 341 ml, 5% alcohol)
- A bottle of cider (12 oz., 341 ml, 5% alcohol)
- A glass of wine (5 oz., 142 ml, 12% alcohol)
- A shot glass of spirits (1.5 oz., 43 ml, 40% alcohol)

Try to drink less by paying to how much you drink by setting a weekly target and make sure you do not have more than two standard drinks per day. If you choose to drink, here are some things you can do to reduce your risk of getting sick or injured:

- Have a meal or a snack with your drink. Don't drink on an empty stomach.

- Drink slowly. Don't have more than 2 standard drinks in one sitting.
- Have a glass of water or non-alcoholic, caffeine-free beverage (such as a soft drink or fruit juice) between drinks.
- Avoid risky situations and activities. Don't drink and drive, and don't get in a car with a driver who has been drinking.
- Don't take over-the-counter or prescription medicines that interact with alcohol.
- Limit how much you drink.



Who should not drink alcohol at all?

Although most people can have a drink now and then, some people should not drink at all.

Don't drink alcohol if:

- You're pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Alcohol can harm the developing baby (fetus). Alcohol can pass into the baby's blood. It can damage and affect the growth of the baby's cells. During pregnancy, not drinking alcohol is the only safe option.
- You breastfeed your child. If you choose to drink, breastfeed just before you drink alcohol. And wait to breastfeed at least 2 hours after you have a drink to reduce the amount of alcohol the baby may get in the milk.
- You're taking over-the-counter or prescription medicines that interact with alcohol.
- You have health problems made worse by drinking, such as liver problems, heart failure, uncontrolled high blood pressure, or certain blood disorders.
- You have a mental health problem and are using alcohol to try to make yourself feel better.
- You have problems controlling how much you drink, or you had alcohol problems in the past.
- You're at work.
- You plan to drive or operate tools or machinery.
- You plan to play sports or take part in physical activities.
- You're taking care of someone or supervising others.
- You need to make important decisions.

Talk to your doctor about whether drinking alcohol is a good choice for you. And if it is, ask how much is okay.

Wellness Articles

Alberta Health Services encourages all Albertans to live a healthy life. These weekly Wellness Articles are created by a team of healthcare professionals from AHS in collaboration with provincial healthcare experts in Alberta and content from myhealth.alberta.ca.

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