

## Alcohol and your health: Weighing the pros and cons

For every news story you read about the benefits of alcohol, another seems to warn you of the risks. The conflicting information can be confusing and frustrating. Though it's unclear whether alcohol's health benefits outweigh its risks, what is certain is that anything more than moderate drinking — two drinks a day if you're a man or one drink a day if you're a woman — can negate any benefits alcohol has on your body.

So should you avoid alcohol? Or can you continue to enjoy your glass of wine with dinner? It's up to you and your doctor. Here are some points for you to consider.

**Pros** Moderate alcohol consumption may provide some health benefits. It can:

- Reduce your risk of developing heart disease, peripheral vascular disease and intermittent claudication
- Reduce your risk of dying of a heart attack
- Reduce your risk of strokes, particularly ischemic strokes
- Lower your risk of gallstones
- Possibly reduce your risk of diabetes

**Cons** Excess alcohol consumption can lead to serious health problems, such as:

1. Cancer, such as gastrointestinal, oral, pharynx, larynx, esophageal and liver cancers, as well as breast cancer in women
2. Chronic pancreatitis, especially in people with high levels of triglycerides in their blood
3. Elevated levels of triglycerides in the blood
4. High blood pressure
5. Miscarriage
6. Injuries due to impaired motor skills
7. Sudden death in people with cardiovascular disease
8. Heart failure
9. Stroke
10. Alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver
11. Fetal alcohol syndrome in an unborn child, including slow growth and nervous system problems
12. Suicide

**What counts as a drink?** A drink is defined as 12 ounces (oz.) of beer, 5 oz. of wine or 1.5 oz. of 80-proof distilled spirits. Keep in mind that people age 65 and older shouldn't drink more than one drink a day. Age-related changes make older adults process alcohol more slowly, leading them to become intoxicated more quickly and increasing alcohol's damaging effects.

**Who shouldn't drink alcohol?** People with certain health conditions shouldn't drink alcohol at all, since even small amounts of alcohol could cause problems. Don't drink alcohol if you have:

- Had a hemorrhagic stroke
- Liver disease
- Pancreatic disease
- Precancerous signs of cancer of the esophagus, larynx, pharynx or mouth

If you have a family history of alcoholism, be particularly cautious when it comes to drinking, as you are at risk of alcoholism.

In addition, alcohol can interact with many common prescription and over-the-counter medications. Check with your doctor, if you take:

Antibiotics      Antidepressants      Anti-diabetes medications      Beta blockers

If you combine alcohol with aspirin, you face an increased risk of gastrointestinal bleeding. And if you use alcohol and **acetaminophen (Tylenol, others)**, you increase your risk of liver damage (or accidental fatal overdose due to this combination over several days). In fact, the Food and Drug Administration requires all over-the-counter pain relievers and fever reducers to carry a warning label advising those who consume three or more drinks a day to consult with their doctors before using the drug.

## What to make of all the evidence

Weigh the pros of moderate drinking against the cons and decide for yourself whether drinking is right for you. Be sure to consult your doctor if you have questions or are unsure.

Above all, don't feel pressured to drink. Few medical experts, if any, advise nondrinkers to start drinking. But if you do drink and you're healthy, there's no need to stop as long as you drink responsibly and in moderation.

<b>C</b>	Have you ever felt you should <b>C</b> ut Down on your drinking?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>
<b>A</b>	Have people <b>A</b> nnoyed you by criticizing or complaining about your drinking?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>
<b>G</b>	Have you ever felt bad or <b>G</b> uilty about your drinking?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>
<b>E</b>	Have you ever had a drink in the morning ( <b>E</b> ye Opener) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?	Yes <input type="radio"/>	No <input type="radio"/>

**FACTS:** 60% 13yr olds drinking in last month & (1/3) 4x as likely Alcoholism vs. 5% if >20yr when 1st start  
50% HS Seniors drunk, >20% binge (40% in college) & 9% used illicit drug in last month

Just one alcoholic drink can impair your ability to perform certain tasks necessary for safe driving, such as braking, steering, changing lanes and exercising good judgment. The only way to lower your blood alcohol concentration is to stop drinking and wait until your body metabolizes the alcohol you've already had.

Hangover: due to congeners in dark EtOH, as well as dehydration + sleep deprivation.  
Rx: Gatorade, avoid caffeine.

Coffee's about as helpful as a cold shower or a brisk walk in sobering you up. That is, it's not helpful at all. Coffee will not lower your blood alcohol concentration — the proportion of alcohol to blood in your body. There's no conclusive evidence that prickly pear extract can cure a hangover. One small study found taking dietary supplement containing extracts of prickly pear fruit before drinking alcohol may reduce some common hangover symptoms, such as nausea, dry mouth and loss of appetite. But benefits were modest. Larger studies would be needed to determine if it really works or if there are any side effects.

0.5oz abs Alcohol = 10gm:  
12 oz of 4% Beer  
5 oz of 10% Wine  
1.25oz 40% Vodka = 86proof  
1.25oz 43% Whiskey = 86proof

**12Million addicted/Alcohol**, 50M/tobacco, 2M/cocaine, 1M/heroin  
Men 5x risk/Alcoholism  
>70% Alcoholics are heavy smokers

If all Americans ages 12 to 20 stopped drinking — it's illegal at that age range in every state anyway — and adults stopped drinking excessively, spending on alcohol would drop by **\$57 billion** a year.

As it stands, the heaviest adult drinkers — averaging about 13 drinks a day — spend nearly \$31 billion annually. Other adults who drink excessively — averaging three drinks a day — spend another \$23 billion. If both groups had only two drinks a day, they'd cut alcohol expenditures from \$54 billion to \$19 billion, a difference of \$35 billion.

And if those underage drinkers started obeying the law, another \$22 billion would be saved.  
24% of drivers in crashes were either impaired — a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.01 to 0.09 — or outright drunk — a BAC of 0.10 or more in 2000.