



ALCOHOL
and **you**

ALCOHOL AND **CANCER**

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There is no level of drinking that can be considered 'safe' from the risk of cancer.

7 types of cancer can be caused by alcohol
12,800 people are diagnosed with alcohol-related cancer each year in the UK (that's 35 people every day) There were 28% more hospital admissions for alcohol-related cancers in 2014/15 than in 2004/05

Alcohol can cause several types of cancer

- Mouth and Upper throat
- Larynx
- Oesophagus
- Breast in women
- Liver
- Bowel

Is this only a problem for heavy drinkers?

No. The more someone drinks, the higher their risk of developing cancer. However, for some cancers the risk increases to some extent even at low consumption levels. For example, a 2012 review of over 200 studies found that people who consumed up to just 1.5 units per day still had increased risks of mouth and upper throat, food pipe and breast cancers.



How does alcohol cause cancer?

There are several ways in which alcohol can cause cancer, which vary for different types of cancer.

Alcohol has a wide range of complex effects on the body, some of which are likely to explain how it can cause cancer.

The processes that are supported by good-quality evidence are as follows:

- Ethanol is converted into a chemical called acetaldehyde in the body, which causes cancer by damaging our cells.
- Alcohol acts as a solvent that helps the body absorb other carcinogens, such as those found in tobacco.
- Alcohol increases oestrogen levels in women, which can in turn increase the risk of breast cancer.
- Liver cancer without underlying liver disease is rare, indicating that the way in which alcohol causes cancer in the liver is related to the effects of the build-up of scar tissue in the liver over time.

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→ Getting support

Drinking alcohol is a risk factor in itself, but when a person smokes as well as drinks, the two work in combination to greatly increase the risks of cancer, beyond simply adding the two risks together. Head and neck cancers (including throat, voice box and food pipe) are particularly affected by the combination of drinking and smoking.

What if someone cuts down the amount of alcohol they drink?

People can significantly cut the risk of cancer by reducing the amount of alcohol they drink.

We know that people who drink less have lower levels of cancer risk, and, coupled with the evidence from those who have stopped drinking, it is clear that if someone reduces their current drinking levels they can reduce their risk of cancer.

To reduce risk keep to the recommended guide to units from the Chief Medical Officers



ALCOHOL UNITS GUIDE

STANDARD DRINK UNITS



Download our FREE app:
'Know Your Units'



MEN & WOMEN SHOULD DRINK NO MORE THAN 14 UNITS PER WEEK

If you are worried about your drinking, see your GP or use the alcohol and drug services in your area which can be found at www.drugsandalcoholni.info

or see the Alcohol and You website that has self-help and a range of information and resources.

www.alcoholandyouni.com

ALCOHOL
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Developed by Ed Sipler

Health Development Specialist in
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