

Physical Concerns – Use of Alcohol

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/alcohol>

The evidence indicates that the more alcohol a person drinks—particularly the more alcohol a person drinks regularly over time—the higher his or her risk of developing an alcohol-associated cancer. Alcohol consumption may also be associated with an increased risk of second primary cancers.

What are the levels of alcohol use?

Alcohol can be an addictive substance. Not everyone who consumes alcohol will become addicted, but continuing to use alcohol despite risks and consequences can be a sign of a problem. Moderate alcohol use is considered having 1 drink per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men. Heavy alcohol use is considered having more than 7 drinks per week for women (3+ drinks on any day) and more than 14 drinks per week for men (4+ drinks on any day).

What are the risks of heavy alcohol use?

Most people know that heavy drinking can cause health and other alcohol-related problems. But many people might not know that drinking alcohol also can raise their risk of developing cancer, worsen symptoms of cancer, or interact with cancer treatments to cause harmful side effects.

Can I drink alcohol during treatment?

It's important for you to speak to your health care team about whether or not it is safe to drink alcohol during or immediately following treatment. The doctors and nurses administering treatment will be able to give specific advice about whether drinking alcohol is safe with particular drugs.

Where can I get help with my alcohol use?

Alcohol is frequently used as a coping strategy during times of stress, like managing a cancer diagnosis and treatment. However, there are a number of treatments available to support recovery from alcohol use disorder and/or to help you adopt and maintain healthy coping strategies and lifestyle behaviors. If you believe you need support, talk to your care team. Your doctors and nurses can help you to navigate options. A team social worker may be a particularly good resource for you.

To talk with someone at anytime:

SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

- Free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues.
- 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Adapted from: <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/alcohol/alcohol-fact-sheet>

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NIH, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Cancer](#)
- [NIH, National Cancer Institute, Alcohol and Cancer Risk](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Alcohol](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Nutrition and Physical Activity During and After Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Center for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC, Alcohol and Cancer](#)

Información Española

- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, Alcohol y el riesgo de cáncer](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Alcohol](#)
- [American Cancer Society, La relación entre el consumo de alcohol y el cáncer](#)