

# alcohol & chronic disease

## supporting health and life



### Alcohol and Your Heart

You may have heard that alcohol is good for your heart. In fact, alcohol can lower the risk of stroke and heart disease. However this applies only to people who are 45 years of age and older. There is no health protection from drinking alcohol for younger men and for women who have not reached menopause.

In fact, the risk of heart disease and stroke rises when alcohol consumption exceeds recommended weekly limits.

### Cancer and Other Serious Illnesses

Many people do not realize that drinking alcohol is associated with a number of serious health problems. These include several types of cancer, such as mouth, throat, esophagus, colon, and liver cancer. The risk of breast cancer in women is also increased with drinking. As a person's average weekly consumption of alcohol increases, so does the chance of facing these illnesses. Alcohol can also contribute significant calories which makes it difficult to maintain a healthy weight.

### Alcohol and Dependence

Regular drinking can lead to tolerance (a need for more alcohol to achieve the same effect) and to habit formation. These can lead to alcohol dependence (a condition where alcohol takes a dominant role in one's life). People can protect themselves by not drinking on some days each week.

### The Bottom Line

People should not start drinking in order to improve their health. There is no level of drinking that is "no risk" – drinking, even at moderate levels, brings some risk of chronic disease.

The best advice is to stay within the weekly limits. This will help maintain a balance between benefits and risks. Drinking above these limits results in rapidly increasing risk and no additional benefit. Other ways to improve and maintain heart health include regular exercise, following Canada's Food Guide and not smoking.

### To reduce long-term health risks, Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines recommend

- no more than 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days
- no more than 15 drinks a week for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days
- not drinking on some days each week

### According to the BC Alcohol & Other Drug Monitoring project

- In 2009, BC hospitalization rates for alcohol-related conditions were estimated to be 433 per 100,000 residents – up significantly from 2002 (361 per 100,000 residents)
- Per capita consumption increased from 7.8 to 8.9 litres of absolute alcohol between 2002 and 2009
- 42% of alcohol is consumed in ways not recommended by the guidelines

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