

THE FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL



WHAT IS ALCOHOL?

Whether you choose to drink wine, beer or spirits, they all contain alcohol. The alcohol in all alcoholic drinks is a chemical called ethanol – produced when grains, fruit or vegetables go through a process called fermentation.

HOW DOES ALCOHOL AFFECT YOUR RISK OF CANCER?

One of the ways that drinking alcohol can increase your cancer risk is when your body breaks it down, it can cause damage to your cells.

There is strong scientific evidence that all alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of six cancers: mouth and throat, oesophageal, breast, bowel, stomach and liver cancer.

To help prevent cancer, there is no safe limit to how much alcohol you can drink as even small amounts can increase your risk of cancer.



For some cancer types, alcohol is particularly harmful if you smoke and drink at the same time.

To reduce your risk as much as possible, we recommend not drinking alcohol at all.

Drinking alcohol can also increase your risk of several other diseases, including heart disease. It's also worth keeping in mind that no alcoholic drink is considered healthy.

Alcoholic drinks are surprisingly high in calories and can be high in sugar. They lack the nutrients that your body needs too. Find out how many calories are in a range of alcoholic drinks at wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator

WHAT ARE THE ALCOHOL GUIDELINES?

The UK recommendation is to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week, spread across at least three days. That's like six pints of average-strength beer or six medium glasses of average-strength wine.

Lots of people in the UK drink more than this, but cutting down could make a big difference to your health and risk of cancer.



WHAT IS A UNIT?

A unit of alcohol is 8g or 10ml of pure alcohol.

- One **25ml** measure of spirits (40% ABV) such as vodka or whisky is **1 unit**
- One small (**125ml**) glass of wine (12% ABV) is **1.5 units**
- One bottle of lager/ beer/ cider (**330ml**, 4.5% ABV) is **1.5 units**
- One **pint** of beer/ lager/ cider (4% ABV) is **2.2 units**



The higher the alcohol by volume (ABV), the stronger the drink.

You can find the ABV on the labels of alcoholic drinks. For example, wine that says '12% ABV' or 'alcohol by volume 12%' means that 12% of that drink is pure alcohol.

HOW CAN I CUT DOWN ON MY ALCOHOL INTAKE?

- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones like sugar-free drinks or water.
- Avoid double measures of spirits, even if they are marketed as 'better value'.
- Dilute your drinks – for example, a small wine spritzer with soda water rather than a large glass of wine.
- Sip your drinks – try to avoid drinking too quickly.
- Don't stock up on alcohol at home – the more you have, the more likely you are to drink.
- Look ahead – think about your plans and set yourself an alcohol limit.
- Try allocating certain days of the week when you don't drink alcohol.
- Choose low-alcohol or alcohol-free alternatives such as mocktails and alcohol-free lager, beer, wine and cider.
- Set yourself a budget for alcohol when you are out.
- People often drink alcohol to relieve stress – instead, why not try going for a walk or dancing to your favourite song?

For alcohol-free drink ideas, have a look at our recipes: wcrf-uk.org/drinks

For help and support with alcohol, visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice



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For any enquiries or to request the information in large print, please contact us:

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