

POLICY FACTSHEET

Alcohol and cancer prevention

The World Cancer Research Fund's Cancer Prevention Recommendations advise everyone not to drink alcohol as part of everyday life to lower cancer risk¹ and to support living well with and beyond cancer².

This factsheet outlines how this recommendation can be rolled out at a population level. It expands advice in World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention, which combines evidence on cancer risk – our Cancer Prevention Recommendations – with policy advice for population-level prevention.



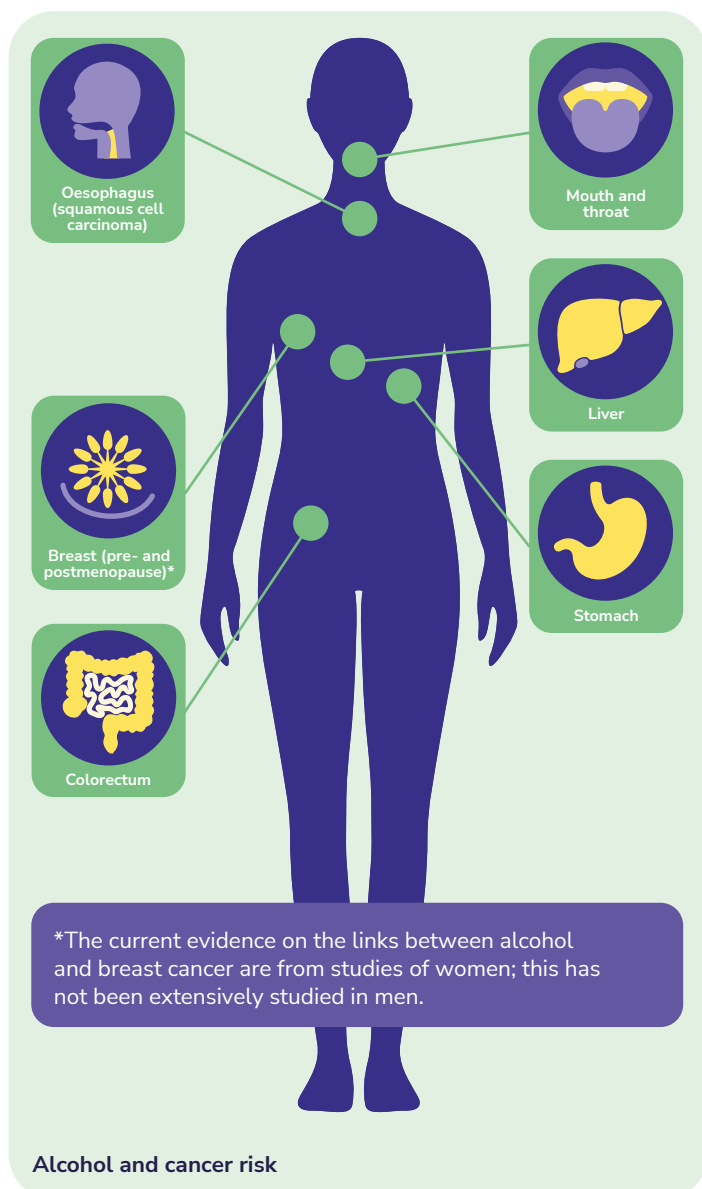
CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATION:

Limit alcohol consumption

For cancer prevention, it is best not to drink alcohol

For more details, see: wcrf.org/evidence-for-our-recommendations/limit-alcohol-consumption

Worldwide, 740,000 new cancer cases were estimated as attributable to alcohol consumption in 2020.³



There are 7 key policy areas to support healthy environments for limited alcohol consumption:



Marketing restrictions



Healthy urban and built environments



Fiscal and legal policies



Effectively inform people



Healthy and safe schools



Counselling in healthcare



Procurement, planning and incentives in communities

Unlocking the co-benefits of cancer prevention policies

Our policy recommendations also have co-benefits in relation to prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), meeting sustainability targets, reversing health inequities, addressing commercial determinants of health and fulfilling human rights. World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention includes an assessment of co-benefits and potential trade-offs when policy goals do not align.

wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention

Marketing restrictions



- Restrictions on alcohol marketing and advertising across all types of media (including digital) and sponsorship, particularly marketing that reaches large numbers of young people and other vulnerable populations (such as through social media influencers and celebrities).
- Restrictions on alcohol promotion in educational buildings, workplaces, public transport and health facilities.
- Restrictions on sponsorships of sporting events by alcohol companies, as well as promotion at outdoor public spaces, and at sporting and cultural events.

Fiscal and legal policies



- Excise taxes on alcoholic drinks, regularly adjusted to inflation, with tax revenue allocated to health budgets.
- Minimum unit pricing policies for alcoholic drinks sold in retail establishments and licensed premises, regularly adjusted to inflation.

Healthy and safe schools and other settings



- Restrictions on alcohol consumption in educational buildings, workplaces, public transport and at health facilities as well as public outdoor spaces, and at sporting and cultural events.

An integrated strategy which together addresses the influence of diet, weight, breastfeeding, physical activity and alcohol consumption will have a greater impact on cancer risk and survivorship than individual factors alone. For more information, visit wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention

Procurement, planning and incentives in communities



- Restrictions on days and hours of sale of alcohol.
- Licensing system on retail sales or alcohol retail monopolies on the production and/or sale of alcohol.
- Lower visibility and separation of alcoholic drinks from other products.

Healthy built environment



- Restrictions on density and zoning of retail outlets (including bars, restaurants, off-sale, grocery and speciality shops).

Effectively inform people



- Health warning labels about alcohol harms including cancer risk and other health harms.
- National alcohol guidelines to inform public of health risks of consuming any level of alcohol.
- Health promotion campaigns to inform public on the link between cancer and alcohol.

Counselling in healthcare



- Routine screening, treatment and care for alcohol use in health services.
- Brief psychosocial interventions in health care and community settings.



Strategies to support our policy recommendations on alcohol consumption

- Develop, implement, and/or strengthen national alcohol strategies to support population-level reduction of alcohol consumption.
- Discontinue use of phrases such as 'harmful use of alcohol', 'responsible drinking' and 'moderate drinking'. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption for cancer prevention, and therefore there is no such thing as harmless use of alcohol.
- Allocate revenues from taxes on alcohol (as a health-harming product) to health budgets and programmes.
- Prioritise health equity; data show that alcohol related harms are concentrated among the most deprived, even though their level of alcohol consumption is lower.
- Follow international guidance, including the WHO Best Buys⁴, the Global action plan on alcohol⁵, and the WHO SAFER⁶ initiative.



Our other resources for policy-makers, professionals and the general public

Resources for policy-makers

- Alcohol position statement wcrf.org/policy/alcohol-policy

Resources for health professionals and the general public

- wcrf.org/living-well
- aicr.org/resources/media-library
- Resources in Dutch wkof.nl

References

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2. Chan DSM, Vieira AR, Aune D, et al. Body mass index and survival in women with breast cancer-systematic literature review and meta-analysis of 82 follow-up studies. *Ann Oncol*. 2014;25(10):1901-1914.
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4. World Health Organization. Tackling NCDs: best buys and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. World Health Organization; 2024.
5. World Health Organization. Global alcohol action plan 2022–2030. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024.
6. World Health Organization. The SAFER initiative [online]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. [Accessed December 15, 2024]. Available from: who.int/initiatives/SAFER/about

About us

World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on the links between diet, nutrition, weight and physical activity and cancer. We are an international not-for-profit association that leads and unifies a network of cancer prevention charities, including the American Institute for Cancer Research, World Cancer Research Fund in the UK and Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands. World Cancer Research Fund International is in official relations with the World Health Organization.

Acknowledgements

For a full list of acknowledgements please scan the QR code.



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