

# Nutrition and Health Info Sheet

# ALCOHOL

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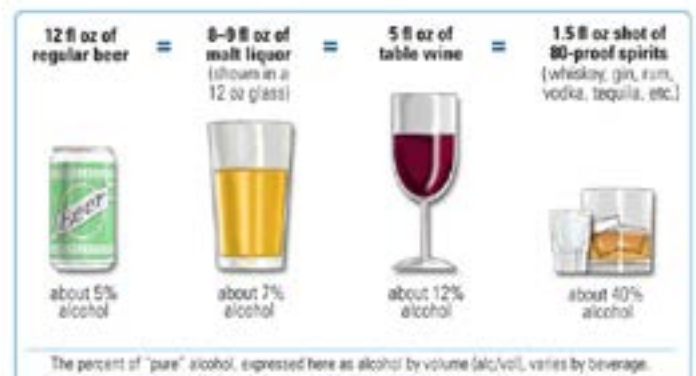
## What is alcohol?

Alcohol is found in drinks like wine, beer, and liquor.<sup>1</sup> Each year there are around 88,000 deaths related to alcohol; 10,000 of these are due to drunk driving. This makes alcohol the third leading cause of preventable death in the US.<sup>2</sup>

## What is considered 'one drink' in the United States?

One drink is equal to 0.6 ounces of pure alcohol. This amount of alcohol can be found in:

- 12 ounces (one can or bottle) of beer with 5% alcohol content,
- 8 ounces of malt liquor with 7% alcohol content
- 5 ounces of wine with 12% alcohol content
- 1.5 ounces of spirits with 40% alcohol content.



Moderate alcohol drinking is defined as up to one drink each day for women and up to two drinks each day for men.<sup>1</sup>

## Alcohol Recommendations

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020 recommend that some groups do not drink alcohol. These groups include:<sup>1,3</sup>

- Those under the legal drinking age of 21 years old.
- Women who are or may be pregnant.
- Those driving, planning to drive, or those doing any activity needing skill and awareness.

- Those taking any medicine (over-the-counter or prescription) that may be affected by alcohol.
- Those with certain illnesses or conditions.
- Those who are cannot control the amount they drink or are recovering from alcoholism.

Those under the age of 21 should not drink alcohol. Young people who start drinking alcohol before 15 years old are six times more likely to become dependent than adults who begin drinking at 21 years old. There has been a strong relationship with higher risk of death, injuries, poor school performance, and risky sexual behaviors in young drinkers.<sup>1</sup>

## Does alcohol have benefits?

Studies have shown that moderate drinking of red wine may have health benefits compared to people who don't drink alcohol. A compound found in the grape skin called resveratrol may lower the risk of heart disease.<sup>5</sup> Some other studies have found that moderate alcohol consumption may lower the risk of dementia.<sup>6</sup>

## What are the results of drinking too much alcohol?

*Brain function:* Drinking any alcohol affects brain function by slowing reaction time, lowering coordination and judgment, changing your speaking, and lowering balance and motor skills.<sup>1,4,5</sup> These changes can increase the risk of injury, car accidents and violence.<sup>1</sup> Long term drinking has been shown to shrink the size of the brain.<sup>4</sup>

*Liver function:* Heavy drinking of alcohol can cause damage to the liver. This may lead to many health problems like fatty liver, liver swelling, or permanent liver damages.<sup>3,4</sup> Based on some studies, one in five heavy drinkers will develop liver swelling and one out of four heavy drinkers will develop permanent liver damage.<sup>3</sup>

*Cancer risk:* Drinking too much alcohol can increase the risk of developing mouth, throat, liver, and breast cancers. In one study, seven out of 10 patients with mouth cancer reported that they drink heavily.<sup>4</sup>

*Pancreas function:* Too much alcohol may cause severe swelling of the pancreas.<sup>7</sup> Heavy drinking affects the ability of the pancreas to manage blood sugar levels and digestion.<sup>4</sup>

*Effects on the heart:* Heavy drinking can affect the health of the heart muscle. It can cause irregular heartbeat, stroke, or high blood pressure.<sup>4</sup> Studies have shown that those who binge drink are 56% more likely to have a stroke than those that do not binge drink.<sup>3</sup>

*Risk of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD):* If pregnant women drink alcohol, the alcohol in the mother's bloodstream can travel to the baby and cause damage.<sup>1,8</sup> Some serious effects of FASD include problems with learning, memory, communication, a small head size, low body weight, or abnormal facial features.<sup>8</sup> No amount of alcohol is safe during pregnancy, however, it is never too late to stop drinking.<sup>1,8</sup>

## What is binge drinking?

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism describes binge drinking as consuming enough alcohol to raise blood alcohol level to 0.08% or higher. This typically means 5 or more drinks for men within 2 hours, and 4 or more for women. Binge drinking leads to “getting drunk”.<sup>1</sup>

## What are the signs, symptoms, and implication of alcoholism?

Alcoholism is a chronic disease, also known as severe alcohol use disorder.<sup>2</sup>

Some signs and symptoms include:

- Not being able to control drinking
- Constant drinking despite personal and professional problems
- The need to drink for alcohol’s effect
- Lack of focus from desire to drink

If a drinking problem is suspected:

- Seek advice with a healthcare provider
- The National Drug and Alcohol Treatment Referral Routing Service (NDATRRS) can give information about community’s treatment center and professionals that can help communicate about alcohol problems
- NDATRRS contact: 1-800-662-HELP<sup>1</sup>

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