



# alcohol & chronic disease

## supporting health and wellness

### To reduce long-term health risks, Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health advises that

- for those who consume 2 standard drinks or less per week, risk is **low**
- for those who consume 3-6 drinks per week, risk is **moderate**
- for those who consume above 6, risk **goes up** with every further drink per week

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

- Per capita consumption increased from 8.3 to 9.4 litres of pure alcohol between 2002 and 2020
- In 2019, BC hospitalization rates for alcohol-related conditions were estimated to be 352 per 100,000 residents – up significantly from 2007 (289 per 100,000 residents)

Injury or illness does not prevent holistic wellbeing. However, short- or long-term damage can compromise wellness, and alcohol can contribute significantly to chronic disease.

### Alcohol and Your Heart

Evidence now shows after all that a little alcohol does not improve flow of oxygen-bearing blood to the heart. It is, however, a risk factor for most other types of cardiovascular disease (incl. hypertension [high blood pressure], heart failure, atrial fibrillation and hemorrhagic stroke).

### Cancer and Other Serious Illnesses

Drinking alcohol is associated with a number of serious health problems. These include at least seven types of cancer – of the mouth, throat, larynx, breast, liver, esophagus, colon and rectum. 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 can make 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 help themselves avoid this through regular alcohol-free days or weeks.

### 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 respect weekly benchmarks. This will help maintain a balance between benefits and risks. Drinking above moderation results in rapidly increasing risk and no additional benefit. Other ways to improve and maintain health include regular exercise, following Canada's Food Guide and not smoking.

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