

# Health Effects of Alcohol

## Short Term Health Risks

Alcohol use, especially binge drinking, has immediate effects that increase the risk of harm including:

- **Violence**  
Fights, intimate partner violence, and child abuse.
- **Risky Sexual Behaviours**  
Unprotected sex, sex with multiple partners, and increased risk of sexual assault. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections (STI's).
- **Alcohol Poisoning**  
A medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels that can cause passing out, low blood pressure, low body temperature, coma, problems breathing, or even death.
- **Unintentional Injuries**  
Traffic injuries (drinking and driving), falls, drowning, burns, and unintentional firearm injuries.

## Long Term Health Risks

Over time, alcohol use can lead to the development of many physical, emotional, mental, and social problems including:

- **Heart Problems**  
Heart attack, heart disease and high blood pressure.
- **Cancer**  
Cancers of the head & neck, liver, colon, and breast. In general, the risk of cancer rises with increasing intake of alcohol. If you drink & smoke cigarettes, the risk of developing certain cancers is even greater.
- **Mental Health Problems**  
Alcohol dependence, depression, anxiety, and suicide.
- **Social Problems**  
Unemployment, financial crisis, and family/friend problems.
- **Stroke**
- **Liver Disease**
- **Stomach Problems**

Sources:

Butt, P., Beirness, D., Gliksman, L., Paradis, C., & Stockwell, T. (2011). [Alcohol and health in Canada: A summary of evidence and guidelines for low risk drinking](#). Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Rethink Your Drinking (2016). Health Effects. Retrieved from <http://www.rethinkyourdrinking.ca/risks/>

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# Reducing Your Risk

## Recommendations For Reducing Your Risk If You Choose To Drink Alcohol:

- Follow [Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#).
- Don't drink in any situation where there's a risk of injury to yourself or others — for example, drinking and driving.
- Don't mix alcohol with other drugs (this includes prescription drugs).
- Decide how much you will drink ahead of time and keep yourself to this limit.
- Take a limited amount of money with you if you go out to have a drink.
- Keep track of the amount you drink.
- Drink slowly and avoid drinking games.
- Eat before and while you are drinking.
- Alternate alcoholic with non-alcoholic beverages when you drink.
- Choose alcoholic beverages with lower alcohol content.
- If you are the designated driver, don't drink any alcohol or consume any other drugs.
- Do not become intoxicated with people you do not know and trust; criminal victimization is a much greater risk when you are drunk.
- Remember the need to practice safer sex — always use condoms.

## Where Can I Get Help?

There are many things that you can do to reduce the risk of hurting yourself or others. Here are some supports you can reach out to and start making a change:

- Health Care Professional (Doctor or Nurse Practitioner)
- School Nurse, Social Worker or Guidance Counsellor
- A family member or trusted adult
- Connex Ontario 1-866-531-2600 [www.connexontario.ca](http://www.connexontario.ca)
- Addiction Services Thames Valley 519-673-3242 [www.adstv.on.ca](http://www.adstv.on.ca)
- Reach Out 519-433-2023 [www.reachout247.ca](http://www.reachout247.ca)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) 1-888-495-2261 <http://www.camh.ca/>

### Sources:

Butt, P., Beirness, D., Gliksman, L., Paradis, C., & Stockwell, T. (2011). [Alcohol and health in Canada: A summary of evidence and guidelines for low risk drinking](#). Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2018). Drinking Guidelines. Retrieved from <http://www.ccdus.ca/Eng/topics/alcohol/drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx>