



Alcohol and Cancer: Proof Matters by the American Institute for Cancer Research

'Tis the season for festive drinks, but before you head to the liquor cabinet – read the latest about why you may want to enjoy the non-alcoholic varieties for cancer prevention.

Whether it's rum punch or a glass of wine, plenty of alcohol flows during the holidays, right through midnight on New Year's Eve. But taking it easy with the alcohol isn't just a word to wise drivers. Research shows that it's a good idea for everyone to limit alcohol for good health and lower cancer risk.

One of the big conclusions of AICR's expert report was that alcohol increases the risk for several cancers. The more one drinks, the higher the risk.

The evidence was convincing that drinking alcohol increases the risk for cancers of the:

- mouth, pharynx, and larynx (throat)
- esophagus
- colorectal for men
- breast

Alcohol probably also increases the risk for cancers of the:

- liver
- colorectal for women

What's It Doing in There?

Scientists don't yet know exactly how alcohol increases cancer risk, but lab studies show several ways it potentially could. Possible mechanism include:

- Alcohol may help cancer-causing compounds enter cells, where they can then damage the DNA.
- Alcohol may decrease the absorption and use of folate, a B vitamin needed for production and repair of DNA
- When alcohol breaks down in the body, one of the substances – acetaldehyde – may play a role in triggering cancer.

Genetics may also play a role, with some people more susceptible to alcohol's damaging effects. However, researchers are a long way from identifying individual differences in safe levels of alcohol consumption.

So What's One Drink?*

- beer = 1 bottle or can (12 oz)
- wine = small glass (5 oz)
- spirits (80 proof) = 1 shot, 1.5 oz

*Alcohol strength varies widely in each group; these are general guidelines.

To Drink or Not to Drink:

Although the link between alcohol and cancer is clear, studies also consistently find that moderate amounts of alcohol may protect against heart disease. That's why AICR's recommendation leaves room for a drink or two, depending upon if you are male or female.

Men are recommended to have two or fewer alcohol drinks a day and women at most one drink per day.

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