

[Health Effects of Alcohol: What You Need to Know](#) [1]

Description: NIAAA overview of health effects of alcohol

Health Effects of Alcohol: What You Need to Know

The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) recommends that individuals who drink not consume more than the following amounts of alcohol per day:

Safe Drinking Levels:

Men -- no more than 2 drinks per day

Women -- no more than 1 drink per day

Over 65 -- no more than 1 drink per day

Note: A standard drink is 12 grams of pure alcohol, which is equal to:

- one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler,
- one 5-ounce glass of wine,
- or 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits.

Most people who drink do so in moderation and never experience problems related to drinking.

However, the NIAAA stresses that all drinkers should be aware of possible health effects related to the consumption of alcohol. Drinking above the recommended safe drinking levels can substantially increase the effect alcohol can have on the body.

Drinking to excess has been linked to many health conditions such as cancers, liver damage, and immune deficiencies. Alcohol use can also cause damage to the brain and harm the fetus during pregnancy. Homicides and suicides have also been found to occur more often in those who have been drinking. Read more about specific body systems and how they can be effected by alcohol.

The Heart

Recently research has found a correlation between reduced coronary heart disease and moderate

Health Effects of Alcohol: What You Need to Know

Published on SBIRT Training (<http://local.sbirtraining.com>)

drinking. There is some debate, however, over whether or not alcohol is the cause of the lower risk.

Some believe that the moderate intake of alcohol helps prevent clot formation within coronary arteries, thus protecting the heart from disease. Others suspect that the correlation may be due to shared traits, such as diet and exercise. Whatever the case may be, the NIAAA does not recommend people start drinking to try to prevent heart disease. The NIAAA does not believe the basis for health improvement has yet been established as deriving from alcohol itself. For most individuals, the side effects and risks of alcohol outweigh the potential benefits.

The Liver

According to the NIAAA, more than 2 million Americans suffer from alcohol-related liver disease. Fatty liver, which is the most common type of liver disease, is reversible with abstinence. However, there are more serious types of liver disease, such as hepatitis and cirrhosis. Alcohol hepatitis is when the liver becomes inflamed as a result of excess drinking over the years. Symptoms can include fever, jaundice, and abdominal pain. Hepatitis can cause death if drinking continues but may be reversible if the individual is able to abstain from alcohol. Cirrhosis is the scarring of the liver tissue. About 10% to 20% of heavy drinkers develop cirrhosis, another potentially fatal disease. If a person with cirrhosis can stop drinking, his or her chances of survival and quality of life often improve with abstinence.

The Pancreas

The pancreas is the organ that helps with digestion. It can also help regulate blood sugar levels by producing insulin. Long-term heavy drinking can cause pancreatitis, an inflammation of the pancreas. Symptoms of pancreatitis can include severe abdominal pain, chronic pain, diarrhea, and weight loss. In some instances it can be fatal.

The Brain

Health Effects of Alcohol: What You Need to Know

Published on SBIRT Training (<http://local.sbirtraining.com>)

Images of alcoholic and nonalcoholic brains have been studied and compared. Results show that chronic alcoholics have smaller, lighter, more shrunken brains. For example, one study which looked at brain images of chronic drinkers over 5 years found progressive brain shrinkage that was not typical of nonalcoholics in the same age group. The frontal cortex shrunk along with the deeper regions of the brain that help control memory, coordination, and balance.

The Immune System

The consumption of alcohol can hurt the normal function of the immune system, which helps fight off disease and infection. Chronic consumption has been shown to reduce the number of white blood cells produced in animals and humans.

Gastrointestinal Tract Disorders

The gastrointestinal (or GI) tract mainly functions to break down ingested food and excrete waste products. It is where alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream. Chronic consumption of alcohol can effect several regions of the GI tract. Alcohol can cause mucosal injuries or lesions when it comes in contact with the oral cavity, pharynx, esophagus, and stomach. It can interfere with saliva secretion and inflame the mouth or tongue. Alcohol is also often associated with tooth decay and gum disease.

Cancers

There is some research that suggests long-term heavy drinking can increase the chance of developing certain types of cancer. This includes cancer of the esophagus, mouth, throat, larynx, colon, and rectum. Research also suggests that women may slightly increase their likelihood of developing breast cancer by having as little as 1 drink per day

field_vote:

Health Effects of Alcohol: What You Need to Know

Published on SBIRT Training (<http://local.sbirtraining.com>)

Product: [alcohol](#) [2]

Tags: [cancer](#) [3]

Source URL: <http://local.sbirtraining.com/node/1476>

Links:

[1] <http://local.sbirtraining.com/node/1476>

[2] <http://local.sbirtraining.com/category/product/alcohol>

[3] <http://local.sbirtraining.com/category/tags/cancer>