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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/alcohol.html>

## Alcohol

Also called: Drinking

Many Americans drink alcohol at least occasionally. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans [[https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/DGA\\_2020-2025\\_ExecutiveSummary\\_English.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2021-03/DGA_2020-2025_ExecutiveSummary_English.pdf)] say that adults of legal drinking age should either not drink or drink in moderation. Drinking less is better for your health than drinking more. Also, there are some people who should not drink at all.

If you are going to drink, it's important to know how alcohol affects you and how much is too much.

### How does alcohol affect the body?

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. This means that it is a drug that slows down brain activity. It can change your mood, behavior, and self-control. It can cause problems with memory and thinking clearly. Alcohol can also affect your coordination and physical control.

Alcohol also has effects on the other organs in your body. For example, it can raise your blood pressure and heart rate. If you drink too much at once, it could make you throw up.

### Why are the effects of alcohol different from person to person?

Alcohol's effects vary from person to person, depending on a variety of factors, including:

- How much you drink
- How often you drink
- Your age
- Your sex
- Your genetics
- Your overall health
- Whether or not you have a family history of alcohol problems

### What is moderate drinking?

- For most women, moderate drinking is no more than 1 standard drink a day
- For most men, moderate drinking is no more than 2 standard drinks a day

Even though moderate drinking may be safe for many people, there are still risks. Moderate drinking can raise the risk of death from certain cancers and heart diseases.

### What is a standard drink?

In the United States, a standard drink is one that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol, which is found in:

- 12 ounces of regular beer (5% alcohol content)
- 5 ounces of wine (12% alcohol content)
- 1.5 ounces or a "shot" of distilled spirits or liquor (40% alcohol content)

## **Who should not drink alcohol?**

Some people should not drink alcohol at all, including those who:

- Are in recovery from an alcohol use disorder [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaud.html>] (AUD)
- Are unable to control the amount they drink
- Are under age 21 [<https://medlineplus.gov/underagedrinking.html>]
- Are pregnant [<https://medlineplus.gov/pregnancyandsubstanceuse.html>] or trying to become pregnant
- Are taking medicines that can interact with alcohol
- Have medical conditions that get worse if you drink alcohol
- Are planning on driving
- Will be operating machinery or doing activities that require skill, coordination, and alertness

If you have questions about whether it is safe for you to drink, talk with your health care provider.

## **What is excessive drinking?**

Excessive drinking includes binge drinking and heavy alcohol use:

- Binge drinking is drinking so much at once that your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level is 0.08% or more:
  - For men, this usually happens after having 5 or more drinks within a few hours.
  - For women, it is usually after about 4 or more drinks within a few hours.
- Heavy alcohol use means:
  - For men, having more than 5 drinks on any day or more than 15 drinks per week.
  - For women, having more than 4 drinks on any day or more than 8 drinks per week.

Binge drinking raises your risk of injuries, car crashes, and alcohol overdose. It also puts you at risk of becoming violent or being the victim of violence.

Heavy alcohol use over a long period of time may cause health problems such as:

- Alcohol use disorder (AUD)
- Liver diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/liverdiseases.html>] , including cirrhosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/cirrhosis.html>] and fatty liver disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/fattyliverdisease.html>]
- Heart diseases [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartdiseases.html>]
- Increased risk of certain cancers
- Increased risk of injuries

Heavy alcohol use can also cause problems at home, at work, and with friends. But treatment [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaudtreatment.html>] can help.

*NIH: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism*

## **Start Here**

- Alcohol Topics A to Z [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics-a-to-z>]  
 (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
- Alcohol Use and Your Health [<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/about-alcohol-use/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Alcohol Use: Weighing Risks and Benefits [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/alcohol/art-20044551?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/alcohol/art-20044551?p=1>]
- Alcohol's Effects on Health [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health>]  
 (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
- Hangovers [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/hangovers>]  
 (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/resaca>]

- How Many Is Too Many? When Drinking Becomes a Problem [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/10/how-many-too-many>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/cuanto-alcohol-es-demasiado>]

## Diagnosis and Tests

- Alcohol Use Screening Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/alcohol-use-screening-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/evaluacion-del-consumo-de-alcohol/>]
- Blood Alcohol Level [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/blood-alcohol-level/>]  (National Library of Medicine)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-alcohol-en-la-sangre/>]

## Prevention and Risk Factors

- College Drinking - Changing the Culture [<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
- Tips to Try -- Rethinking Drinking [<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/thinking-about-change/tips-try>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

## Related Issues

- Alcohol and the Brain: An Overview [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/alcohol-and-brain-overview>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/generalidades-sobre-el-alcohol-y-el-cerebro>]
- Alcohol: Does It Affect Blood Pressure? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/FAQ-20058254?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/high-blood-pressure/expert-answers/blood-pressure/faq-20058254?p=1>]
- Antidepressants and Alcohol: What's the Concern? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/depression/expert-answers/antidepressants-and-alcohol/FAQ-20058231?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/depression/expert-answers/antidepressants-and-alcohol/qaq-20058231?p=1>]
- Drugged Driving [<https://nida.nih.gov/publications/drugfacts/drugged-driving>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)  
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/publicaciones/drugfacts/conducir-bajo-el-efecto-de-drogas>]
- Effects of Mixing Alcohol and Caffeine [<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/about-alcohol-use/alcohol-caffeine.html>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
- Harmful Interactions: Mixing Alcohol with Medicines [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/harmful-interactions-mixing-alcohol-with-medicines>]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/reacciones-adversas>]
- Risky Drinking Can Put a Chill on Your Summer Fun [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/risky-drinking-can-put-chill-on-your-summer-fun>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/beber-peligrosamente-puede-enfriar-la-diversion-del-verano>]
- Understanding the Dangers of Alcohol Overdose [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/understanding-dangers-of-alcohol-overdose>]  **Easy-to-Read** (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/es/node/5421>]
- Using Alcohol to Relieve Your Pain: What Are the Risks? [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/using-alcohol-to-relieve-your-pain>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/recurrir-al-alcohol-para-aliviar-el-dolor-cuales-son-los-riesgos>]

## Specifics

- Alcohol Poisoning [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/alcohol-poisoning/symptoms-causes/syc-20354386?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/alcohol-poisoning/symptoms-causes/syc-20354386?p=1>]

• Alcohol's Effects on the Body [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohols-effects-body>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/los-efectos-del-consumo-de-alcohol-en-el-cuerpo>]

• Understanding Alcohol Drinking Patterns [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-drinking-patterns>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/definicion-de-niveles-y-patrones-de-consumo-de-alcohol>]

## Health Check Tools

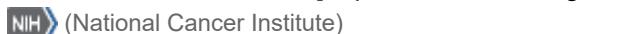
• Alcohol Calorie Calculator

[<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/specialfeatures/calculators/alcoholcaloriecalculator.aspx>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

• Calculators [<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/calculators>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

• Worksheets and More [<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/worksheets-more>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

## Statistics and Research

• Alcohol and Cancer Risk [<https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/alcohol/alcohol-fact-sheet>]  (National Cancer Institute)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.cancer.gov/espanol/cancer/causas-prevencion/riesgo/alcohol/hoja-informativa-alcohol>]

• Alcohol Facts and Statistics [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/alcohol-facts-and-statistics>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/alcohol-topics/datos-y-estadisticas-sobre-el-alcohol>]

• Facts About U.S. Deaths from Excessive Alcohol Use [<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/facts-stats/>] 

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

## Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

• Article: Efficacy of Probiotic VITA-PB2 from Fermented Foods on Alcohol Consumption and... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40732900>]

• Article: Aversion-resistant alcohol seeking in the human laboratory. [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40618299>]

• Article: Individual stress reactivity predicts alcohol craving and alcohol consumption in alcohol... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40610438>]

• Alcohol -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Alcohol+Drinking%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22%5Bedat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

## Find an Expert

• FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)   
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]

• Getting Help [<https://www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/specialfeatures/gettinghelp.aspx>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

• National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>] 

## Women

• Women and Alcohol [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/women-and-alcohol>]  (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism) - PDF

Also in Spanish [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/las-mujeres-y-el-alcohol>]

## Older Adults

- Aging and Alcohol [<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/aging-and-alcohol>] NIH (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)
- Facts about Aging and Alcohol [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/alcohol-misuse-or-alcohol-use-disorder/facts-about-aging-and-alcohol>] NIH (National Institute on Aging)  
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nia.nih.gov/espanol/alcohol/datos-factuales-sobre-envejecimiento-alcohol>]

## Patient Handouts

- Alcohol use and safe drinking [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001944.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001944.htm>]
- Calorie count - Alcoholic beverages [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000886.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000886.htm>]
- Deciding to quit drinking alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000523.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000523.htm>]
- Do you have a drinking problem? [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000507.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000507.htm>]
- Health risks of alcohol use [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000494.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000494.htm>]
- Weight loss and alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000889.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000889.htm>]
- When you are drinking too much - tips for cutting back [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000503.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)  
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000503.htm>]



## MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Alcohol use and safe drinking [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001944.htm>]
- Breath alcohol test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003632.htm>]
- Calorie count - Alcoholic beverages [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000886.htm>]
- Deciding to quit drinking alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000523.htm>]
- Do you have a drinking problem? [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000507.htm>]
- Ethanol poisoning [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002644.htm>]
- Health risks of alcohol use [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000494.htm>]
- Responsible drinking [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000527.htm>]

Weight loss and alcohol [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000889.htm>]

When you are drinking too much - tips for cutting back [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000503.htm>]

Wine and heart health [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001963.htm>]

## Related Health Topics

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaud.html>]

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) Treatment [<https://medlineplus.gov/alcoholusedisorderaudtreatment.html>]

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/fetalalcoholspectrumdisorders.html>]

Underage Drinking [<https://medlineplus.gov/underagedrinking.html>]

## National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Alcohol* is the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism [<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>]

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