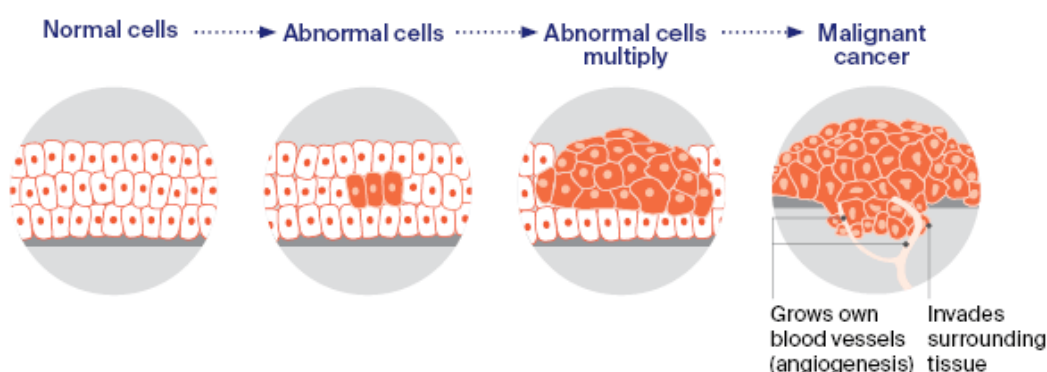


## Alcohol and cancer

### What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the body's cells. Normally, cells grow and multiply in a controlled way. However, sometimes cells become abnormal and keep growing. Abnormal cells can form a mass called a tumour. Cancer is the term to describe collections of these cells, growing and potentially spreading within the body.



### Is there a safe amount of alcohol to drink?

There is no safe level of alcohol use when it comes to cancer risk. Even drinking small amounts of alcohol increases the risk of cancer. The more you drink, the greater the risk.

### Is one type of alcohol worse than another for my health?

The type of alcohol you drink doesn't make any difference. Beer, wine and spirits all increase your risk of cancer. Even at low intake, alcohol contains a lot of energy (kilojoules or calories) so it can easily contribute to weight gain. Being overweight or obese also increases your cancer risk.

### What types of cancer are linked to increased alcohol consumption?

There is strong evidence that alcohol increases the risk of at least seven types of cancer, including pharynx (throat), mouth, larynx (throat), oesophagus, liver, breast and bowel cancer.

## **What are the guidelines for alcohol consumption?**

To reduce your risk of cancer, if you don't drink, don't start. If you choose to drink alcohol, Cancer Council recommends you do so within the National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines. These guidelines recommend drinking no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day.

People who are planning a pregnancy, are pregnant and/or breastfeeding, or under the age of 18 years should not drink alcohol.

## **How does alcohol increase cancer risk?**

Alcoholic drinks and the chemical present in these drinks (ethanol) are classified as Group 1 carcinogens, which means that there is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that alcohol causes cancer. There is strong evidence that drinking alcohol increases people's risk of breast, liver, mouth, throat (pharynx and larynx), oesophagus and bowel cancer. Heavy drinking may also increase people's risk of stomach cancer.

Alcohol can cause cancer by:

- Ethanol (pure alcohol) and its toxic by-product, acetaldehyde, damage cells by binding with DNA and causing cells to divide incorrectly
- Influencing hormone levels, which can modify how cells grow and divide
- Direct tissue damage, increasing the absorption of other carcinogens.

## **Is alcohol good for heart health?**

In the past, some evidence suggested red wine might have had health benefits for heart disease, but this does not appear to be the case. Neither the Heart Foundation of Australia, nor the World Health Organization recommends consuming alcohol (including red wine) to prevent cardiovascular disease.

There are better things you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease as well as cancer, such as not smoking, healthy eating, being physically active and aiming for your healthy body weight.

### What is a standard drink?

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol. The type of alcohol makes no difference, 10 grams of alcohol is 10 grams of alcohol, whether it is in beer, wine or spirits. It does not matter whether it is mixed with soft drink, fruit juice, water or ice.

- Light beer (2.7% alc/vol) 425 mL
- Mid strength beer (3.5% alc/vol) 375 mL
- Full strength beer (4.9% alc/vol) 285 mL
- Regular cider (4.9% alc/vol) 285 mL
- Sparkling wine (13% alc/vol) 100 mL
- Wine (13% alc/vol) 100 mL
- Fortified wine e.g. sherry, port (20% alc/vol) 60 mL
- Spirits e.g. vodka, gin, rum, whiskey (40% alc/vol) 30 mL

For more information

Visit our website <https://www.cancer.org.au/cancer-information/causes-and-prevention/diet-and-exercise/limit-alcohol>

or contact our cancer prevention team at [prevention@cancertas.org.au](mailto:prevention@cancertas.org.au)