

Lower-Risk Alcohol Drinking

There are guidelines that can help you to make more informed decisions about drinking alcohol. These guidelines recommend setting limits to help you reduce the acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) health risks of alcohol use.^{1,2}

It's important to keep in mind that the intention of the guidelines is not to encourage people who abstain (for cultural, spiritual, health or other reasons) to *start drinking*, and that these are 'low-risk' guidelines, not 'no-risk' guidelines.¹ Any amount of alcohol consumption can have risks to your health. There are also specific evidence-based recommendations for people 65 years of age or older.

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines identify that for adults aged 25-65 years, you can reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:

- 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days^{1,2}
- 15 drinks a week for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days^{1,2}

While Canadian experts recommend no more than 3 drinks a day for men, and 2 drinks a day for women, this amount may be too much for many older adults. The Canadian Coalition of Seniors' Mental Health recommends a lower amount than the general guidelines. They advise that **women 65 and older have no more than 1 standard drink per day and no more than 5 alcoholic drinks per week; and men 65 and older, have no more than 1-2 standard drinks per day, with no more than 7 per week.**³

It's also important to plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

For these guidelines, "a drink" means:

Category	Volume	Alcohol Content
Beer	341 ml (12 oz.)	5% alcohol content
Cider/Cooler	341 ml (12 oz.)	5% alcohol content
Wine	142 ml (5 oz.)	12% alcohol content
Distilled Alcohol (rye, gin, rum, etc.)	43 ml (1.5 oz.)	40% alcohol content

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (2012).

If you choose to drink, there are a number of things you can do to help reduce your risk of getting sick or injured.¹

1. Don't drink on an empty stomach, have a meal or a snack with your drink;
2. Drink slowly - don't have more than 2 standard drinks in any 3-hour period;
3. Have a glass of water or non-alcoholic, caffeine-free beverage between drinks;
4. Avoid risky situations and activities - don't drink and drive, and don't get in a car with a driver who has been drinking;
5. Check warning labels on all medications, and talk with your doctor or pharmacist about possible interactions with alcohol;
6. Limit how much you drink.

1. 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: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
 2. Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. (2012). *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines [brochure]*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.
 3. Canadian Coalition for Seniors' Mental Health. (2019). *Canadian Guidelines on Alcohol Use Disorder Among Older Adults*. Toronto.