

# Alcohol and cancer: Reducing your risk

Many people are not aware of the link between alcohol and cancer. Research shows that drinking alcohol increases the risk of at least seven types of cancer including common cancers like breast and bowel.

## What causes cancer?

Cancer can be caused by many uncontrollable factors such as age, genetics and hormones. But we know that a third of all cancers can be prevented by some simple actions:

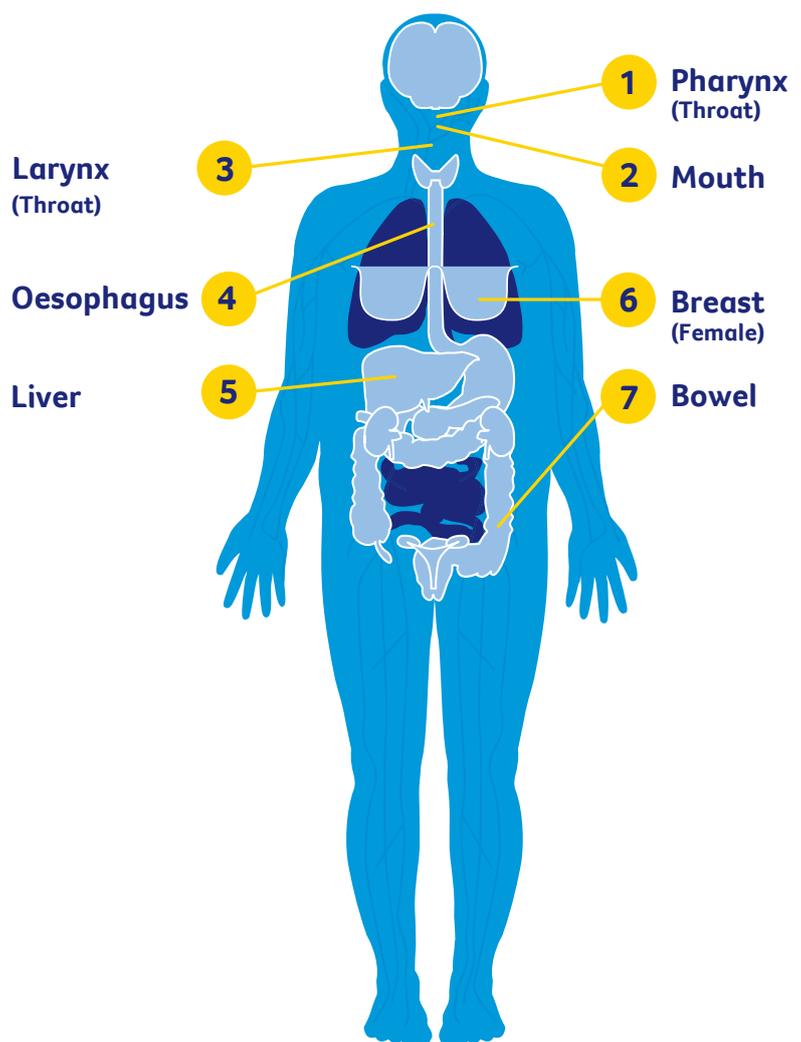
- not smoking
- maintaining a healthy weight
- being active
- eating a healthy diet
- protecting ourselves from the sun
- participating in cancer screening programs
- limiting alcohol consumption.

## How does alcohol increase cancer risk?

Alcohol is a known carcinogen. This means that alcohol causes cancer. There is strong evidence that drinking alcohol increases the risk of at least seven types of cancer including female breast, liver, mouth, throat (pharynx and larynx), oesophagus and bowel. Drinking alcohol may also increase the risk of stomach cancer.

## Alcohol may increase cancer risk in the following ways:

- Pure alcohol (ethanol) broken down by the body becomes a toxic chemical called acetaldehyde which can damage DNA, causing cells to be replicated incorrectly.
- Direct tissue damage, increasing the absorption of other carcinogens.
- Influencing hormone levels, which can modify how cells grow and divide.



**Alcohol increases the risk  
of at least 7 types of cancer**

## How can I reduce my risk?

When it comes to cancer risk, there is no safe level of drinking. Reduce your drinking to reduce your risk of cancer.

Every additional alcoholic drink increases your risk of cancer. Whether it's beer, wine or spirits, the increased risk is the same. If you drink, have no more than 10 standard drinks in a week to help reduce your risk of cancer and other diseases from alcohol. Have no more than four standard drinks on any one day to reduce your risk of injury and other short-term harms from alcohol.

## What is a standard drink?

Using standard drinks to measure your alcohol consumption is more accurate than counting the number of drinks you have had.

It can be hard to estimate how much we are really consuming because:

- drinks come in different sizes
- glasses may be topped up by other people
- we may consume mixed drinks (cocktails or punch).

Try our standard drink tool at [www.cancervic.org.au/alcohol](http://www.cancervic.org.au/alcohol) to learn how many standard drinks are contained in common glasses and help reduce your drinking to reduce your risk of cancer.

## This is what a standard drink looks like



### Beer

3.5% alcohol  
375ml



### Wine

9.5% to 13% alcohol  
100ml



### Spirits

40% alcohol  
30ml

## Tips to reduce drinking

- Know your triggers. If you drink more alcohol when you are stressed or tired, try going for a walk or doing something else to distract you.
- Try having an alcohol-free house.
- Aim to have alcohol-free days each week.
- Join in community events such as FebFast or Dry July to keep you motivated.
- Offer to be the designated driver when you go out, but make sure you stay under .05.
- Count your standard drinks – remember, a drink in a bar or restaurant is likely to contain more than one standard drink.
- Choose a low-alcohol (or no-alcohol) beer and/or wine.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks like sparkling water or soda and lime.
- Dilute alcoholic drinks.
- Use water to quench your thirst and sip alcoholic drinks slowly.

## Where can I find support?

If you or someone you know needs support, contact:

- your doctor
- DirectLine on 1800 888 236 for free and confidential support to help reduce drinking [www.directline.org.au](http://www.directline.org.au).

Visit Cancer Council Victoria at [www.cancervic.org.au/alcohol](http://www.cancervic.org.au/alcohol) for further information, supportive tools, services and resources.

If you have been diagnosed with cancer, your best option is to speak with your specialist doctor or general practitioner. For cancer information and support from experienced cancer nurses call 13 11 20.