



Limit or Avoid Alcohol

CHALLENGE
Drink nonalcoholic
drinks or limit
your daily intake.

Requirements to Complete this WELLNESS CHALLENGE

1. Keep a written record of the quantity and type of drinks you consume each day.
2. Read “Tips for cutting back,” “Health effects,” and “How much is a drink?”
3. To complete the Challenge, drink non-alcoholic drinks or limit yourself to 1 drink a day if you are a woman, or 2 drinks daily if you are a man, every day this month.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge for documentation.

Common, but dangerous

Social drinking is generally seen as fashionable and fun. If you're like most people who drink, just one drink of alcohol leaves you feeling relaxed and happy. In reality, the alcohol has slowed down activity in the part of your brain that is responsible for sensory functions, inhibition, and thought processing.

Research shows that alcohol affects the mind and judgment long before a person shows the physical signs normally associated with intoxication. A beer or two might make it easier to talk to someone you're attracted to, or to be the “life of the party.” But it also removes the checkpoint that keeps you from doing dangerous things, such as driving recklessly or having unprotected sex. In some people, alcohol speeds up the electrical impulses – resulting in excitability, anger, or violence.

As more alcohol is consumed, fine motor skills and reaction time begin to suffer, and behavior becomes poorly controlled and sometimes aggressive. Continued drinking can lead to slurred speech and loss of coordination and balance that alerts people that someone is “drunk.” At higher levels, alcohol acts as a depressant, which causes people to become sleepy and sometimes pass out.

How much is a drink?

Because drinks vary in their alcohol content, you might need to drink less than you want to. A drink is defined as:

- one 12-oz. beer (5 percent alcohol)
- one 5-oz. glass of wine (11 percent alcohol)
- one 3½-oz. glass of sherry (17 percent alcohol)
- one 1½-oz. shot of 80 proof liquor (40 percent alcohol)

Guidelines by both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture say that women should limit themselves to 1 drink a day; men should consume no more than 2 drinks a day. Even that amount carries some risk and may be too much for you. Alcohol is absorbed and processed differently by each person due to age, body mass, general health, heredity, acquired tolerance, and gender.



Never drink straight high-concentration alcohol – such as 151 rum or 190 proof grain alcohol. These high-proof spirits must be mixed with soda, juice, or water to lower the concentration of alcohol.

Health effects of alcohol

When you have a drink, your stomach absorbs 20-25 percent of the alcohol, which immediately affects the brain. The remaining 75-80 percent is absorbed in your small intestines and carried to all parts of your body. Many health studies show that a moderate intake of alcohol reduces the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD), primarily in older people with increased risk for CHD. In the INTERHEART study, alcohol reduced the risk of CHD by 3 percent in people who were already living a healthy lifestyle.¹

On the other hand, regular alcohol use – even moderate use – at any age, increases the risk for many other health problems. The more you drink, and the longer you drink, the greater your risk. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism states that alcohol:

- **Damages liver cells** and, if used often enough and long enough, causes cirrhosis or liver disease.
- **Damages pancreatic cells** and can cause pancreatitis.
- **Increases the risk for cancer** of the liver, mouth, throat, larynx, breast, and esophagus.
- **Affects levels of lipids** (cholesterol and triglycerides) and insulin in the blood.
- **Alters mood**, concentration, and coordination.

- **Increases the risk of death** from accidents, especially motor vehicle accidents, drowning, fires, homicide, and suicide.
- **Damages the fetus** during pregnancy.
- **Interacts negatively** with more than 150 prescription and over-the-counter medications, including antihistamines, antibiotics, and antidepressants.
- **Increases the risk of divorce**, depression, unemployment, and poverty.
- **Increases the incidence of aggressive acts**, including vandalism, domestic violence, and child abuse.
- **Affects judgment** relating to sexual behavior and increases the risk of getting sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and AIDS.
- **Damages the stomach's** protective lining which leads to ulcers.
- **Contributes to many long-term health problems**, including malnutrition, skin disorders, disturbed sleep, sexual impotence, obesity, high blood pressure, heart damage, brain damage, memory loss, and psychosocial disorders.

Alcohol continues to affect the brain and body long after the last drink has been downed. And once it's consumed, there is nothing you can do to reduce the level of alcohol in your bloodstream. Common misconceptions are that coffee, a cold shower, or walking will make you less drunk. These have no effect on blood alcohol levels.

Some people should not drink at all

If you are in one of these categories, it is best to not take even one drink:

- Women who are pregnant or trying to conceive
- Children and adolescents
- Individuals who plan to drive or operate machinery
- Anyone taking medication – prescription or over-the-counter
- Those who cannot restrict drinking to a moderate level
- Anyone not wishing to have their judgment impaired

If there has ever been a drinking problem in your family, you are at high risk of addiction.

Alcohol increases a woman's risk for breast cancer, even at a low intake of one drink per day.⁴

Do you drink too much?

To find out, read these questions and answer “yes” or “no”:

- ✓ Do you **drink alone** when you feel angry or sad?
- ✓ Does your drinking ever make you **late for work**?
- ✓ Does your drinking **worry your family**?
- ✓ Do you ever drink after **telling yourself you won't**?
- ✓ Do you ever **forget what you did** while you were drinking?
- ✓ Do you **get headaches** or have a **hangover** after you have been drinking?



If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you likely have a drinking problem and need to cut down.

If you are an alcoholic or have other medical problems, you should not just cut down on your drinking – you should stop drinking completely. If you do, you'll be in good company: 39 percent of Americans prefer to have no alcoholic beverages.² Your doctor will advise you about what is right for you.

Tips for cutting back

The American Medical Association offers these tips:

- Keep track of how much you drink.
- Set a goal. Decide when and how much to drink. Have some days when you don't drink at all.
- Have no more than one drink per hour. Alternate with nonalcoholic drinks.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- Avoid the triggers that urge you to drink (e.g., people, places, activities).
- Don't keep alcohol at home.
- Plan what you will do to handle urges.
- Drink grape juice or sparkling cider instead.
- Have a polite, convincing “No thanks” ready.

Excess alcohol consumption causes more than 75,000 deaths in the United States each year.³

If you or someone you care about has a drinking problem, see a counselor, join a 12-step program, talk with your pastor, or ask your doctor for assistance.

Sources: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; American Medical Association.

1. Yusuf S, Hawken S, Ounpuu S, et al. Effect of potentially modifiable risk factors associated with myocardial infarction in 52 countries (the INTERHEART study): case-control study. *Lancet*, 2004 Sep 11-17;364(9438):937-52.
2. Alcohol use. National Center for Health Statistics. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2004. Available at: www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/alcohol.htm. Accessed March 15, 2007.
3. Alcohol-attributed deaths and years of potential life lost – United States, 2001. *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 2004; 53(37):866-70.
4. Zhang SM, Lee IM, Manson JE, et al. Alcohol Consumption and Breast Cancer Risk in the Women's Health Study. *American Journal of Epidemiology*. 2007 Mar 15;165(6):667-76.





Limit or Avoid Alcohol

Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of drinks you have each day.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you avoided alcohol, or limited yourself to 1 drink if you're a woman, or 2 drinks if you are a man. You must meet this goal every day during the month to complete the challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health.
4. Enter your completion of the Wellness Challenge on your Health Activity Tracker report for the month. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

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MONTH: _____							WC = Wellness Challenge	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____	WC [] ex. min. _____		
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_____ Number of days this month I limited or avoided alcohol

_____ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking

Other wellness projects completed this month:

Signature _____ Date _____

