

PREVENTING CANCER BY REDUCING EXCESSIVE ALCOHOL USE

**ALCOHOL
CAUSES
CANCER**

did you know?



More than half of adults in the United States drink alcohol.¹

Alcohol use increases the risk of several cancers, including female breast cancer.^{2,3,4} There are evidence-based community strategies that work to reduce excessive alcohol use.⁵

This publication provides information about alcohol use among young people and adults and potential strategies for reducing excessive alcohol use in your community.

Cancer Risks Linked with Alcohol Use

Excessive alcohol use is associated with many health and social problems. Alcohol is a carcinogen (something that can cause cancer) and can contribute to the development of cancers of the female breast, liver, colon, rectum, mouth, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus.^{2,3,4}

Regardless of drink type (beer, wine, or liquor), the risk of cancer increases with the number of drinks consumed, and even one drink a day increases the risk of developing cancers of the female breast, mouth, and esophagus.³ Reducing alcohol use may reduce the risk of cancer.⁶

How is alcohol use defined?	
Moderate alcohol use	Defined as consuming up to 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men.
Excessive alcohol use	Includes binge drinking, heavy drinking, any alcohol use by individuals under the age of 21 years (minimum legal drinking age), and any alcohol use by pregnant women.
Binge drinking	A pattern of alcohol use that brings blood alcohol concentration (BAC) levels to 0.08% or more. This is usually defined as consuming 4 drinks or more for women and 5 drinks or more for men on a single occasion, generally within about 2 hours.
Heavy drinking	Defined as consuming 8 drinks or more per week for women and 15 drinks or more per week for men.

Source: Frequently Asked Questions About Alcohol and Public Health

What is a "standard drink" in the US?



12 ounces of beer
5% Alcohol

OR



8 ounces of malt liquor
7% Alcohol

OR



5 ounces of wine
12% Alcohol

OR



1.5 ounces of distilled spirits
40% alcohol (80 proof)
e.g., vodka, whiskey, gin, rum

Source: What is a Standard Drink?

Alcohol Use among Adults

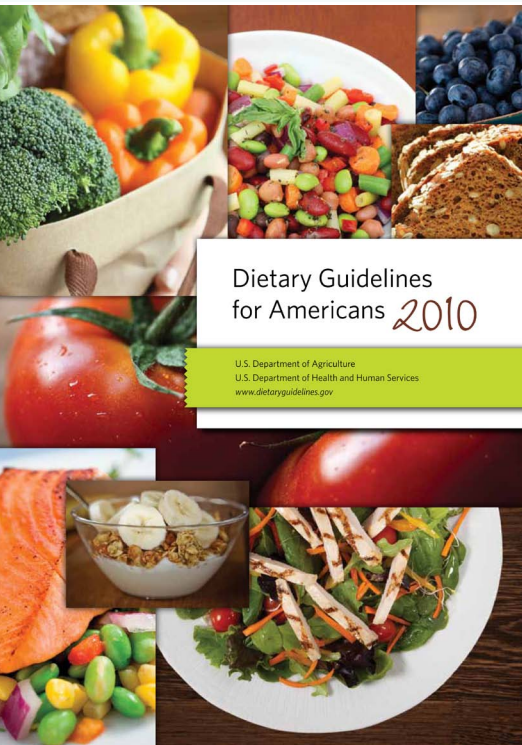
Alcohol use is one of the most common risk factors for cancer among US adults.¹

- 56% of adults drink alcohol.
- 67% of adult drinkers exceed guidelines for moderate alcohol use.⁷
- 17% of adults binge drink.
- 6% of adults are heavy drinkers.

Alcohol Use among Young People

Although the legal age for drinking alcohol is 21 years, drinking alcohol is common among young people in the United States.⁸

- 35% of high school students drink alcohol.
- 21% of high school students have had 5 or more alcoholic drinks on a single occasion (in other words, reported binge drinking).



What Are the Guidelines for Alcohol Use?

According to the 2010 US Dietary Guidelines for Americans:⁹

- Don't start drinking or increase the amount you drink on the basis of potential health benefits. Even moderate intake is associated with increased risks, including some cancers.
- If you choose to drink, do so in moderation—up to 1 drink a day for women or up to 2 drinks a day for men.
- Don't drink at all if you are under age 21, pregnant or may be pregnant, have health problems that could be made worse by drinking, or are engaging in activities for which alcohol is dangerous (like driving).

Source: 2010 US Dietary Guidelines for Americans

If you choose to drink, do so in moderation:



DON'T DRINK AT ALL if you are under the age of 21, or if you are or may be pregnant, or have health problems that could be made worse by drinking

For women up to 1 drink a day



For men up to 2 drinks a day



NO ONE should begin drinking or drink more frequently based on potential health benefits.

What Works to Reduce Excessive Alcohol Use

Community Strategies

The strategies listed below can help communities create social and physical environments that reduce excessive alcohol use. These strategies are recommended by the Community Preventive Services Task Force, an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts, based on systematic reviews of their effectiveness in reducing excessive alcohol use and related harms, including deaths due to excessive drinking.⁵

Increase Alcohol Taxes

Alcohol taxes increase the price of alcohol at the federal, state, or local level on beer, wine, or distilled spirits. Increasing the price of alcohol by 10% would be expected to reduce overall alcohol consumption by an average of about 7% across beverage types. The greater the tax increase, the greater the reduction in excessive alcohol use and related harms.

Regulate Alcohol Outlet Density

Alcohol outlet density means the number and concentration of alcohol retailers (such as bars, restaurants, and liquor stores) in an area. Reducing alcohol outlet density can help reduce excessive alcohol use and related harms. City, county, or state governments can regulate the number of places that sell alcohol through licensing or zoning processes.⁵

Commercial Host “Dram Shop” Liability Laws

Laws that hold alcohol retail establishments liable (at fault) for injuries or harms caused by illegal sales or service to intoxicated or underage (younger than 21 years of age) customers help reduce harms from excessive alcohol use, including deaths from motor vehicle crashes.⁵

Maintain or Limit Days or Hours of Sale

States or communities may limit the days or the hours that alcohol can legally be sold or served. States that have repealed bans on Sunday alcohol sales have experienced an increase in alcohol-related harms (such as, motor vehicle crash deaths) on the day when alcohol sales were previously prohibited. Similarly, increasing hours of sale by two hours or more has been associated with an increase in harms related to excessive alcohol consumption (such as, motor vehicle crash injuries).⁵

Enhance Enforcement of Laws Prohibiting Sales to Minors

The minimum legal drinking age is 21 years in all US states. Enhanced enforcement of the minimum legal drinking age can reduce sales to minors (younger than 21 years) in retail settings (such as, bars, restaurants, liquor stores), thereby helping to reduce youth access to alcohol.⁵

Resources on Community Strategies to Reduce Excessive Alcohol Use

- [The Guide to Community Preventive Services: Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption](#)
- [CDC Fact Sheet: Preventing Excessive Alcohol Use](#)
- [Webinar: Cancer – What’s Alcohol Use Got to Do With It?](#)
- [Reducing Alcohol-Related Harms Through Commercial Host Liability](#)
- [Regulating Alcohol Outlet Density: An Action Guide](#)
- [Web Tool: Consumer Costs and Job Impacts from State Alcohol Tax Increases](#)



Clinical Strategies

Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention Provided in Clinical Settings

Health care providers can screen adults, including pregnant women, for excessive alcohol use to identify people whose levels or patterns of alcohol use place them at increased risk of alcohol-related harms.¹⁰ Health care providers can then recommend or offer treatment services to those at risk. Brief counseling interventions for adults who drink excessively have been found to positively affect several patterns of excessive drinking, including heavy episodic (binge) drinking and high average weekly intake of alcohol.¹⁰

Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention Provided Using Electronic Devices (e-SBI)

The Community Preventive Services Task Force recommends the use of electronic devices such as computers, telephones, or mobile devices to provide screening and brief intervention for excessive alcohol use.⁵ Instead of having a clinician offer screening and brief intervention face to face, Electronic Screening and Brief Intervention (e-SBI) uses electronic devices such as computers, telephones, or mobile devices to provide information and personalized feedback about the risks and consequences of excessive alcohol use and offer advice designed to reduce excessive alcohol use.

US Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) Recommendations Related to Alcohol Use

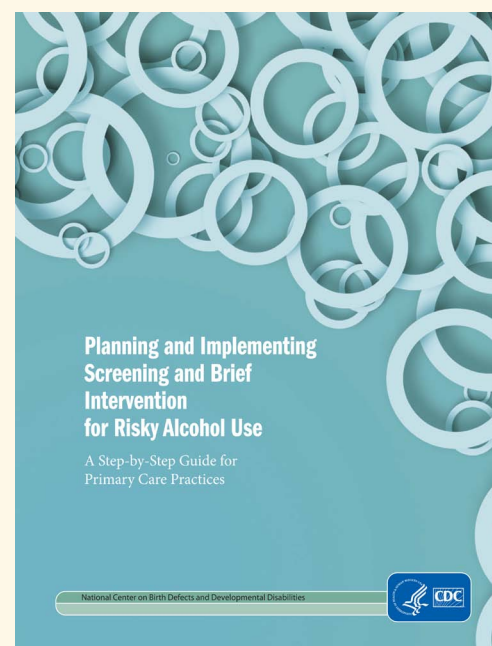
Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse

“The USPSTF recommends that clinicians screen adults aged 18 years or older for alcohol misuse and provide persons engaged in risky or hazardous drinking with brief behavioral counseling interventions to reduce alcohol misuse.”

Grade: B Recommendation.

Resources for Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention

- The Community Guide: e-SBI
- CDC’s Alcohol Screening and Brief Intervention efforts
- CDC guide: [Planning and Implementing Screening and Brief Intervention for Risky Alcohol Use](#)



What Comprehensive Cancer Control Programs Can Do

Comprehensive cancer control programs bring communities and partner organizations together to reduce the burden of cancer. CDC funds states, tribes, US Affiliated Pacific Islands, and territories through the [National Comprehensive Cancer Control Program](#) to form or support coalitions to prevent and control cancer in their communities.

To address alcohol as a risk factor for cancer, comprehensive cancer control programs can start or continue important activities to help reduce excessive alcohol use in their communities.

Collect and Analyze Data

Use the CDC [Prevention Status Reports](#) to learn the status of Community Guide strategies for reducing excessive alcohol use in your state.

- Conduct an environmental scan to identify any additional alcohol-related laws in your area.
- Use the following CDC websites for statistics on excessive alcohol use, including the prevalence of binge drinking in your state and monitor changes in these indicators over time:
 - [CDC Chronic Disease Indicators website](#).
 - [Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System \(BRFSS\) Prevalence and Trends Data](#).
 - [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\) Youth Online](#).
- Collaborate with your [state's BRFSS coordinator](#) to assess additional BRFSS data on alcohol use among adults aged 18 years or older.
- Collaborate with your state's YRBS coordinator to assess additional [YRBS data](#) on alcohol use among high school students.

- Use cancer registry data to examine the incidence rates and death rates for alcohol-related cancers in your state, including cancers of the female breast, liver, colon, rectum, mouth, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus and monitor changes in these indicators over time.
- Consider developing a special survey to examine a topic specific to your prevention efforts.

Identify and Engage Potential Partners

- Educate cancer coalition members on the public health impact of excessive alcohol use and related harms, particularly alcohol-related cancer rates in your area.
- Identify potential partners at local and national levels, and ask them to help you educate key stakeholders on cancer risks linked with alcohol use and strategies to reduce excessive alcohol use.
- Collect information on alcohol use and alcohol-related cancer rates, and share this information with partners and stakeholders.
- Disseminate information on evidence-based prevention strategies for excessive alcohol use, such as those recommended in the Community Guide.
- Survey key partners to identify their needs and what resources they can add to your efforts to reduce excessive alcohol use.
- Ensure that health promotion activities throughout the state are congruent with and supportive of reducing excessive alcohol use.

Measure Your Effects

Developing and implementing an evaluation plan is essential to measure the effect of your comprehensive cancer control program's efforts to reduce excessive alcohol use. Evaluation can also help you track progress toward meeting the goals in your cancer plan and can help set an example or guide for other states.

The [Comprehensive Cancer Control Branch Program Evaluation Toolkit](#) provides guidance on how to plan and conduct evaluations. Plans for evaluation should be developed at the beginning of your efforts. This ensures that appropriate evaluation questions are developed, and that data sources are in place to capture baseline information before intervention activities begin. Behavioral surveillance systems already in place can be used to monitor changes in key excessive alcohol use indicators over time among high school students (YRBS) and adults (BRFSS) in your state.

Consider working with:

- **Substance abuse prevention programs**, including Drug-Free Communities coalitions, to implement effective community-based strategies to reduce excessive alcohol use, such as those recommended in the Community Guide.
- **Public health programs with an interest in reducing excessive alcohol use**, including injury prevention, motor vehicle safety, violence prevention, and HIV and STD prevention programs.
- **Media outlets and retailers** to educate and inform the public about alcohol as a risk factor for cancer as well as effective strategies to reduce excessive alcohol use.
- **Law enforcement** to increase enforcement of laws on the sale and use of alcohol.
- **Schools, state and local education agencies, and parent-teacher associations** to restrict youth access to alcohol.
- **Health care providers, clinics and medical associations** to increase screening and brief interventions for excessive alcohol use, and educate policymakers on effective community prevention strategies.
- **State and local health departments**, who can provide crucial support by identifying, tracking, and providing data on excessive alcohol use and related harms, and assess environmental risk factors for excessive drinking (such as, high alcohol outlet density). They can also provide forums for community planning and educate community leaders about the problem and its solutions.
- **Community mental health centers** to reduce excessive alcohol use among persons with mental health issues.
- **Colleges and universities** to work with community leaders to implement effective strategies to prevent excessive drinking.
- **City planners, urban developers, city and county officials** and agencies responsible for alcohol licensing and zoning.


**Sources of Information on Reducing Excessive Alcohol Use
Professional and Nonprofit Organizations**

- Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (CAMY)
- Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA)
- National Association of Chronic Disease Directors
- The National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors
- National Liquor Law Enforcement Association
- The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- National Behavioral Health Network for Tobacco and Cancer Control
- National Alcohol Beverage Control Association

Federal and International Agencies and Organizations

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Alcohol Program
- World Health Organization
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
- Office of National Drug Control Policy
- Interagency Coordinating Committee to Prevent Underage Drinking (ICCPUD)

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9. US Department of Agriculture and US Department of Health and Human Services. [Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2010](#). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office; 2010. Accessed June 24, 2015.
10. US Preventive Services Task Force. [Screening and Behavioral Counseling Interventions in Primary Care to Reduce Alcohol Misuse: Recommendation Statement website](#). AHRQ Publication No. 12-05171-EF-3. Accessed June 24, 2015.

More Information

Division of Cancer Prevention and Control
National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) • TTY: (888) 232-6348
www.cdc.gov/cancer/promoting_prevention.htm • Twitter: @CDC_Cancer