



While small amounts of alcohol may have a positive effect on your arteries, drinking larger amounts can be bad for your health.

We know that small amounts of alcohol may prevent cholesterol from collecting in the arteries. We also know that alcohol may reduce the risk of heart disease in some people. Indeed, men over age 40 and women over age 50 **who do not have a history of alcohol problems** may benefit from one alcoholic drink a few times a week. However, if you do not drink now, there is no reason to start.

Having half of a drink—such as a half glass of wine—with a meal is probably the best way to benefit from alcohol. However, if you do not drink now, there is no reason to start.

One alcoholic drink. . .

- = One 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler; or
- = One 5-ounce glass of wine; or
- = 1.5 ounces of liquor (like vodka, scotch, or gin) in a shot or a mixed drink (with tonic or juice)

While small amounts of alcohol may have a positive effect on your arteries, drinking larger amounts can be bad for your health. Be informed and responsible about drinking. Understanding your drinking habits will help you make healthy choices.

Drinking safely

Most women can safely have one drink a day. However, you should not drink at all if you are:

- Pregnant
- Trying to get pregnant
- Breastfeeding

Even small amounts of alcohol can be harmful to pregnant women and their babies.

Most men can safely have up to two drinks a day. Because men have more water in their bodies than women, they are able to drink a larger amount of alcohol before getting drunk.

Alcohol affects your reflexes, judgment, and behavior. You should never drink and drive.

Staying healthy without alcohol

If you don't drink now, you don't need to start drinking to reduce your risk of disease. Here are other important things you can do for your health:

- Get at least 150 minutes of physical activity every week.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. The more, the better.
- Don't smoke.

These are the best habits for anyone who wants to reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.

Note: Any alcohol use is harmful for adults who have:

- Been diagnosed as having a problem with alcohol or drugs
- A strong family history of chemical dependency
- Been told by their physician that they have a health problem related to alcohol use

Dangers of drinking too much

Drinking too much alcohol can cause health and social problems, including:

- Liver, heart, and brain damage
- Stomach problems
- High blood pressure
- Difficulty keeping an erection
- Unsafe sexual behavior, which can lead to sexually transmitted diseases or an unplanned pregnancy
- Mood changes or irrational behavior
- Stress in relationships with family and friends
- Problems doing your job that can lead to job loss
- Higher chance of getting breast cancer (for women)

Alcohol dependence

Signs that you may be dependent on alcohol include:

- Having to drink more and more to get the same effect
- Denial of the problem
- Blackouts
- Personality changes

If you are worried about your drinking, ask yourself these questions:

1. Have you felt you should cut down on your drinking?
2. Are other people worried about your drinking?
3. Do you find yourself craving alcohol daily?

4. Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
5. Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning to calm your nerves, get rid of a hangover, or get the day started?
6. Do you hide or sneak drinks or lie about how much you drink?
7. Do you drink to avoid problems or pressures?

If you answered “yes,” “sometimes,” or “often” to one or more questions, call your health care provider. He or she may be able to order tests to see if your drinking is a problem.

How to avoid drinking too much

Plan to do things that don't include drinking. Choose a relaxing activity like taking a walk, visiting a friend who doesn't drink, or going to the movies.

Get help from family or friends. Talk to someone who has had an alcohol problem. Find out what helped him or her stop drinking. Groups like Alcoholics Anonymous can offer support and advice.

Set a goal for yourself. Decide that you will not drink for a week, then another week. Or, decide to drink only one can of beer during the football game or have only one glass of wine with dinner.

Don't give up. Dealing with a drinking problem can take time. Don't let one setback stop you. Forgive yourself if you fall short of your goal. Learn from the experience, and move forward. It's never too late. We are here to help you make healthier choices.

WARNING: If you are taking any medications, talk with your physician or a pharmacist before drinking alcohol.

Other resources

- Visit our Web site at kp.org, or click on your physician's home page at kp.org/mydoctor.
- Alcoholics Anonymous alcoholicsanonymous.org
- Al-Anon/Alateen (family support meetings)
1-888-4AL-ANON
al-anon.alateen.org
- National Drug Information and Referral Line
1-800-662-HELP
- If you are hit, hurt or threatened by a partner or spouse, this can seriously affect your health. There is help. Call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 or connect to ndvh.org.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor.