



Health
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*Your health and
safety... our priority.*

*Votre santé et votre
sécurité... notre priorité.*

Responsible Drinking

Updated: March 2012

Original: November 2004

IT'S YOUR HEALTH

Responsible Drinking

THE ISSUE

Alcohol is a drug: a depressant that slows down your body's central nervous system. Depending on how much you drink, alcohol can affect your concentration, speech, balance, vision, coordination, judgment and overall health.

The effects of alcohol depend on many factors:

- your sex (male or female)
- your body size
- how much you usually drink
- how quickly you drink
- your mood
- the amount you have eaten
- your past experiences with drinking

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF TOO MUCH ALCOHOL

If you have too much to drink you may experience many short-term effects, including:

- drowsiness
- dizziness
- slurred speech
- loss of coordination skills
- inability to think and judge clearly
- inability to estimate distances and decreased reaction times

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF TOO MUCH ALCOHOL

You may be drinking too much on a long-term basis if you notice any of the following:

- the need to drink more to feel the same 'high'
- a lot of money is being spent on alcohol
- poor appetite, jumpiness, insomnia or sweating when not drinking
- blackouts when drinking or not remembering drinking
- bouts of confusion or memory loss



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THE HEALTH RISKS OF TOO MUCH ALCOHOL

Long-term heavy drinking can cause many chronic health problems, including:

- liver damage
- heart disease
- stomach ulcers
- blood vessel disorders
- impotency in men
- menstrual irregularities in women
- some types of cancer

Recent studies have suggested that drinking even a moderate amount of alcohol when pregnant may damage the fetus, causing a range of health problems including [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](#). The bottom line is, the safest option during pregnancy, or when planning to become pregnant, is to not drink alcohol at all.

Of the estimated 3,000 deaths each year from motor vehicle crashes, approximately 40 per cent are attributed to alcohol. Heavy drinking can also lead to serious professional, family, financial and legal problems, any of which can affect your health.

REDUCE YOUR RISK

If you choose to drink, [Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#) can help you decide when, where and how.

Additional tips:

- Limit the amount of alcohol you drink. Your risk of injury increases with each additional drink.
- Eat something before drinking, or drink with meals. It is important not to drink on an empty stomach.
- Try alternating alcoholic beverages with caffeine-free non-alcoholic drinks to limit the amount you drink in any three-hour period.

- Drink only if you want to. Don't feel pressured into accepting a drink.
- Don't drive. Take a taxi or public transportation, walk, or decide who will be the designated driver before the party starts.



As a host, you can protect yourself and your guests by following these tips:

- Limit how much you drink yourself, so you can keep control of things.
- Before the party, ask someone to help you if problems arise.
- Provide alcohol-free drinks like coffee, tea, soft drinks, fruit punch and juice, along with alcoholic drinks.
- Mix and serve drinks yourself or appoint someone responsible as bartender. Guests tend to drink more when they serve themselves.
- Serve food, but avoid salty, sweet or greasy foods because they make people thirstier.
- Stop serving alcohol at least an hour before the party ends.
- Don't rely on coffee to sober guests up. It only makes them more alert, not sober.
- Encourage guests to name designated drivers, leave their cars at home, take taxis or public transport, or walk. Keep cash and taxi numbers ready.
- Be prepared for overnight guests by having blankets, sleeping bags and pillows on hand.
- Never serve alcohol to minors.

CREATION OF CANADA'S LOW-RISK ALCOHOL DRINKING GUIDELINES

In November 2011, the [Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse \(CCSA\)](#) launched the first Canadian low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines. [Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](#) provide Canadians with information on how to minimize risks from their own and others' drinking. They were developed through the National Alcohol Strategy Advisory Committee which is comprised of representative from non-governmental organizations, industry, academia, federal and provincial governments.



THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA'S ROLE

The Government of Canada plays an important role in addressing alcohol-related harm. [The health portfolio](#) has a number of initiatives aimed at reducing alcohol misuse among Canadians, such as:

- [The National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program](#)
- [The Pan-Canadian Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder \(FASD\) Initiative](#)
- Mental health and addictions research, including alcohol and [research on the prevention, treatment and diagnosis of FASD \(CIHR\)](#)
- [The Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey \(CADUMS\)](#)



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), [Alcohol](http://www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/Alcohol/Pages/default.aspx) web page at: www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/Alcohol/Pages/default.aspx
- The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA), [Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines](http://www.ccsa.ca/eng/priorities/alcohol/canada-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx) at: www.ccsa.ca/eng/priorities/alcohol/canada-low-risk-alcohol-drinking-guidelines/Pages/default.aspx
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, [About Alcohol](http://www.camh.net/about_addiction_mental_health/drug_and_addiction_information/about_alcohol.html) at: www.camh.net/about_addiction_mental_health/drug_and_addiction_information/about_alcohol.html
- Canadian Liver Foundation, [How to protect you liver if you drink alcohol](http://www.liver.ca/liver-health/liver-disease-prevention/tips-for-healthy-liver/alcohol-consumption.aspx) at: www.liver.ca/liver-health/liver-disease-prevention/tips-for-healthy-liver/alcohol-consumption.aspx
- Public Health Agency of Canada, [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder \(FASD\)](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fasd-etcaf/index.html) at: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/fasd-etcaf/index.html
- Public Health Agency of Canada, [Healthy Pregnancy Guide—Alcohol and Pregnancy](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide/03_ap-ag-eng.php) at: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-gs/guide/03_ap-ag-eng.php
- *It's Your Health*, [Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/fasd-etcaf-eng.php) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/fasd-etcaf-eng.php

FOR INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONALS

- Health Canada, [Alcohol and drug prevention publications](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/adp-apd/index-eng.php) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/pubs/adp-apd/index-eng.php
- Health Canada, [Drug and alcohol use statistics](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/stat/index-eng.php) at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/stat/index-eng.php

RELATED RESOURCES

- For safety information about food, health and consumer products, visit the [Healthy Canadians](http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca) website at: www.healthycanadians.gc.ca
- For more articles on health and safety issues go to the *It's Your Health* web section at: www.health.gc.ca/iyh

You can also call toll free at 1-866-225-0709 or TTY at 1-800-267-1245*

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