

Alcohol and cancer risk



Drinking increases cancer risk

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx (upper throat), larynx (voice box), oesophagus (food pipe), bowel, breast (in women) and liver. There is some evidence that alcohol also increases the risk of gastric (stomach) cancer and pancreatic cancer.

The risk of these cancers increases with the amount of alcohol drunk. Cancer is not just an issue for heavy drinkers, even drinking at low levels increases risk for some cancers.

When you smoke and drink

Drinking and smoking together rather than just drinking or just smoking, increases the cancer risk even more.

Drinking alcohol and gaining weight

Alcohol can contribute to weight gain. If you are overweight or obese you are at increased risk of some cancers including breast and bowel cancer.

Key recommendations:

- consider not drinking alcohol or at least reduce the amount of alcohol you drink.
- encourage young people not to drink or at least delay their drinking for as long as possible.

Advice if you do drink

For people who choose to drink alcohol, the Health Promotion Agency (HPA) provides low-risk alcohol drinking advice. HPA also provides advice on when not to drink. Visit their website at www.alcohol.org.nz

Ways to reduce your alcohol-related cancer risk:

Do more activities that don't involve drinking.

Delay drinking for as long possible.

Reduce the amount of alcohol you drink and drink less often.

Switch to low strength alcoholic drinks.

The sources of evidence used in developing this information sheet were taken from "The Cancer Society of New Zealand Position Statement on Alcohol and Cancer Risk" (June 2014).