



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



Research shows that small amounts of alcohol may prevent cholesterol from collecting in the arteries. Drinking small amounts of alcohol may reduce the risk of heart disease in some people. Specifically, 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.

#### 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).

Studies show that half a drink (such as a half glass of wine) while eating is probably the best way to benefit from alcohol.

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

### Drinking safely

Most women can safely have one drink a day. However, some should not drink at all. Such women include:

- Pregnant women
- Women who are trying to get pregnant
- Women who are nursing

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 do not get drunk by drinking the same amounts of alcohol.

Because alcohol affects your reflexes and judgment, 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. There are other important things you can do for your health:

- Get plenty of physical activity.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Don't smoke.

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

**Note:** For those adults who have been diagnosed as having a problem with alcohol or drugs; a strong family history of chemical dependency; or those who have been told by their physician that they have a health problem related to alcohol use, any alcohol use is harmful.

## 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
- Reduced blood flow, making it difficult to keep an erection
- Unsafe sexual behavior that can lead to sexually transmitted diseases or an unplanned pregnancy
- 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 “high”
- Denial of the problem
- Blackouts
- Personality changes

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

1. Have you felt you should cut down on your drinking?
2. Are other people worried about your drinking?
3. Have you felt bad or guilty about your drinking?
4. 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?

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

## How to avoid drinking too much

*Plan to do things that do not include drinking.* Don't go places where others are drinking. Distract yourself with relaxing activities like going for walks, visiting with a friend who does not drink, or seeing a movie.

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

**Set a goal for yourself.** Don't let one setback stop you. Forgive yourself. 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 your physician's Home Page at **kp.org/mydoctor** for healthy living resources
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*
- Alcoholics Anonymous **www.alcoholicsanonymous.org**
- Al-Anon/Alateen (family support meetings) 1-888-4AL-ANON **www.al-anon.alateen.org**
- National Drug Information and Referral Line 1-800-662-HELP

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.