

# How too much drinking affects the body

*Alcohol can put lungs, heart, immune system, and more at greater risk*

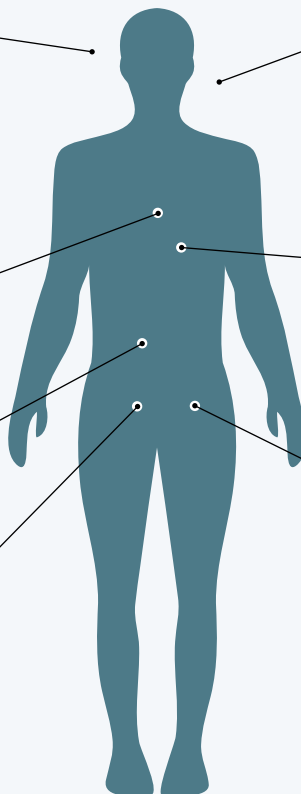
Drinking too much alcohol, or more than a moderate amount, can cause serious health problems. Moderate drinking means up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. For some individuals, even moderate drinking may be too much.

**Brain:** Shortly after drinking, you may have problems with balance, decision-making, memory, and controlling impulses. Long-term alcohol misuse decreases activity in the brain's reward system, increases activity in the brain's stress system, and impairs a person's ability to make good choices.

**Heart:** Common problems include stroke, high blood pressure, irregular heartbeat, and stretching of the heart muscles.

**Liver:** Heavy drinking can lead to cirrhosis, fibrosis, alcoholic hepatitis, or fatty liver. About half of all liver disease deaths are due to alcohol.

**Pancreas:** Excessive alcohol use may lead to pancreatitis, a potentially fatal inflammation of the blood vessels in the pancreas.



**Mouth and throat:** Alcohol consumption is a major risk factor for cancers of the mouth and throat.

**Breasts:** Research suggests that even one drink per day can increase the risk of breast cancer for women.

**Lungs:** People who chronically misuse alcohol are more likely to get pneumonia and tuberculosis. They are more likely to develop Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome, need mechanical ventilation, and have a prolonged stay in the intensive care unit.

**Colon/rectum:** Alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk of colon and rectal cancer.

**Pregnancy:** Drinking during pregnancy can harm your baby's brain and long-term health. Approximately 1 in 20 children are affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, which involve a range of mental, emotional, and physical issues.

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## Drinking levels defined: How much is too much?



**Moderate drinking** means up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men.

0.08%

Blood alcohol concentration

**Binge drinking** means drinking enough to raise your blood alcohol concentration (BAC) to 0.08% or above. This typically occurs after four or more drinks for women and five or more drinks for men in about two hours.



**Heavy alcohol use** means more than three drinks on any day for women and more than four drinks for men.

**SOURCES:** National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services