

Health tip: Understanding alcohol use and misuse

Alcohol is a widely used substance in the United States.¹ Even moderate consumption poses health risks. Reducing alcohol intake and not drinking are recommended for best long term health and well-being.²

Key facts

- Millions of adults in the United States have alcohol use disorder (AUD), and approximately 1 in 10 children live in a home with a parent who has AUD³
- About 178,000 people die from excessive alcohol use each year in the United States⁴
- Every day, 488 people die from excessive alcohol use⁴

Why people drink alcohol⁵

People consume alcohol for various reasons, including:

- Stress relief and relaxation
- Social or cultural influences
- Peer pressure
- Escaping difficult emotions
- Dependence or addiction

Alcohol consumption and guidelines⁶

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

- Moderate drinking is defined as:
 - Up to 2 drinks per day for adult men
 - Up to 1 drink per day for adult women
- Excessive alcohol use includes:
 - Binge drinking—4 or more drinks for women, or 5 or more drinks for men during an occasion.
 - Heavy drinking—8 or more drinks for women, or 15 or more drinks for men during a week.
 - Underage drinking—any use by people younger than 21.
 - Drinking while pregnant—any use during pregnancy



If you do not currently consume alcohol, it is recommended that you do not start³

Scan this QR code to check your drinking and make a plan to drink less.⁶



Health risks²

Short-term risks:

Excessive alcohol use may result in:

- Injuries and accidents
- Violence and risky sexual behaviors
- Alcohol poisoning
- Miscarriage and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASDs) in pregnant women

Long-term risks:

Chronic excessive alcohol use may lead to:

- Poor cardiovascular health and liver disease
- Cancer (eg, breast, liver, and throat cancers)
- Weakened immune system and memory problems
- Mental health disorders and social issues
- Alcohol dependence or alcohol use disorders

Signs of alcohol dependence³

Alcohol dependence, also known as alcohol use disorder, occurs when drinking causes harm or distress.

Signs include:

- Drinking more than planned or developing increased tolerance
- Drinking to the point of blackouts, nausea, or vomiting
- Aggressive behavior and health problems
- Continued drinking despite negative consequences

Resources for help

If you or someone you know is struggling with alcohol use, help is available:

- Discuss behavioral programs and medications with your medical or mental health provider
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – [aa.org](https://www.aa.org)
- Al-Anon – [al-anon.org](https://www.al-anon.org)
- UnitedHealthcare Alcohol and Substance Abuse Helpline – liveandworkwell.com/recovery or call **1-855-780-5955**



By drinking less, you may improve your health in the short and long term. Even a small change may make a difference.²

Sources:

1 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-effects-health/alcohol-topics-z/alcohol-facts-and-statistics/alcohol-use-united-states-age-groups-and-demographic-characteristics>. 2025. Accessed June 2025.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/drink-less-be-your-best/facts-about-excessive-drinking/> 2024. Accessed June 2025.

3 National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA). <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/brochures-and-fact-sheets/treatment-alcohol-problems-finding-and-getting-help> 2025. Accessed June 2025.

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). <https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/excessive-drinking-data/index.html>. 2024. Accessed June 2025.

5 Alcohol Rehab Help. <https://alcoholrehabhelp.org/addiction/alcoholism/aud/>. 2023. Accessed June 2025.

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/about-alcohol-use/index.html#cdc_behavioral_basics_warning_signs-understanding-alcohol-use. 2025. Accessed June 2025

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