

WOMEN AND ALCOHOL

What is a drink?

- One 12 ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler
- One 5 ounce glass of wine; or
- 1.5 ounces of 80 proof distilled spirits

Even in small amounts, alcohol affects women differently than men

Drinking more than one drink per day for women can increase the risk for motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, high blood pressure, stroke, violence, suicide, and certain types of cancer.

Why are lower levels of drinking recommended for women than for men?

Drinking over the long term is more likely to damage a woman's health than a man's, even if the woman has been drinking less alcohol or for a shorter length of time than the man. Alcohol passes through the digestive tract and is dispersed in the water in the body. The more water available, the more diluted the alcohol. As a rule, men weigh more than women, and, pound for pound, women have less water in their bodies than men. Therefore, a woman's brain and other organs are exposed to more alcohol and to more of the toxic byproducts that result when the body breaks down and eliminates alcohol.

Consequences of Unsafe Drinking:

- **Driving:** It doesn't take much alcohol to impair a person's ability to drive. The chances of being killed in a single-vehicle crash are increased at a blood alcohol level that a 140-lb. woman would reach after having one drink on an empty stomach
- **Violence:** Heavy drinking increases a woman's risk of becoming a victim of violence and sexual assault.
- **Cancer:** Many studies report that heavy drinking increases the risk of breast cancer. Alcohol also is linked to cancers of the digestive tract and of the head and neck (the risk is especially high in smokers who also drink heavily).
- **Alcoholic liver disease:** Women are more likely than men to develop alcoholic hepatitis (liver inflammation) and to die from cirrhosis.
- **Brain disease:** Most alcoholics have some loss of mental function, reduced brain size, and changes in the function of brain cells. Research suggests that women are more vulnerable than men to alcohol-induced brain damage.
- **Heart disease:** Chronic heavy drinking is a leading cause of cardiovascular disease. Among heavy drinkers, men and women have similar rates of alcohol-related heart disease, even though women drink less alcohol over a lifetime than men.

Drinking and Ethnicity:

Heavy drinking and drinking problems among White women are most common in younger age groups. Among African American women, however, drinking problems are more common in middle age than youth. A woman's ethnic origins—and the extent to which she adopts the attitudes of mainstream vs. her native culture—influence how and when she will drink. Hispanic women who are more "mainstream" are more likely to drink and to drink heavily (that is, to drink at least once a week and to have five or more drinks at one time).