

LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY: KNOW THE AMOUNTS

Alcohol is part of our culture. It helps us celebrate and socialize, and it enhances our religious ceremonies. Drinking too much on a single occasion or over time can have serious consequences for our health. Most Americans recognize that drinking too much can lead to accidents and dependence, but that's only part of the story. In addition to these serious problems, alcohol abuse can damage organs, weaken the immune system, and contribute to cancers. Plus, much like smoking, alcohol affects different people differently. Genes, environment, and even diet can play a role in whether you develop an alcohol-related disease. On the flip side, some people actually may benefit from drinking alcohol in small quantities. Sound complicated? It sure can be. To stay healthy, and to decide what role alcohol should play in your life, you need accurate, up-to-date information.

Knowing how much alcohol constitutes a "standard" drink can help you determine how much you are drinking and understand the risks. One standard drink contains about 0.6 fluid ounces or 14 grams of pure alcohol. In more familiar terms, the following amounts constitute one standard drink:

- 12 fluid ounces of beer (about 5% alcohol)
- 8 to 9 fluid ounces of malt liquor (about 7% alcohol)
- 5 fluid ounces of table wine (about 12% alcohol)
- 1.5 fluid ounces of hard liquor (about 40% alcohol)

Research demonstrates "low-risk" drinking levels for men are no more than 4 drinks on any single day AND no more than 14 drinks per week. For women, "low-risk" drinking levels are no more than three drinks on any single day AND no more than seven drinks per week. To stay low-risk, you must keep within both the single-day and weekly limits. Even within these limits, you can have problems if you drink too quickly, have health conditions, or are over age 65. Older adults should have no more than three drinks on any day and no more than seven drinks per week.

Based on your health and how alcohol affects you, you may need to drink less or not at all. People who should abstain from alcohol completely include those who:

- Plan to drive a vehicle or operate machinery
- Are pregnant or trying to become pregnant
- Take medications that interact with alcohol
- Have a medical condition that alcohol can aggravate

