

Making Safer Alcohol Choices

Alcohol use is common in the United States: more than 4 out of 5 (86%) adults have had alcohol at least once in their lifetime.¹ Though they might not realize it, many Americans' drinking behavior is considered high-risk. For example, 17% of adults binge drank in the past month,² and 1 in 4 adults have had at least one heavy drinking episode in the past year.³ Despite its widespread use, there are many risks associated with alcohol, including injuries, alcohol poisoning, and miscarriage or fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD) for those who are pregnant.⁴

For those who choose to drink, there are ways to do it more safely. It is important to note, though, that the safest choice for anyone is to abstain completely from alcohol.

Lower your risk:

- If you are going to drink alcohol, drink in moderation.⁵
 - Up to 1 standard serving of alcohol per day for women*
 - Up to 2 standard servings of alcohol per day for men*
- Avoid binge drinking.
 - 4 or more drinks for women*
 - 5 or more drinks for men*
- For some people, there is no level of safer drinking. This includes those who are:
 - pregnant
 - taking certain medications
 - recovering from alcohol use disorder
 - living with certain medical conditions
 - younger than 21.⁶
- The safest choice for anyone is to abstain completely from alcohol.

*Disclaimer: Proof Alliance uses gender-neutral language as often as possible to be more inclusive of the full gender spectrum. However, the current research around alcohol use is based on cisgender people.⁷ In these examples, "women" refers to those assigned female at birth, and "men" refers to those assigned male at birth. These serving size recommendations do not take into effect how hormone therapies (i.e. testosterone, estrogen, or anti-androgens) may impact the body's ability to metabolize alcohol. Please talk with a health care provider about which medications (including hormone therapies) you take before drinking alcohol.

What is a standard serving of alcohol? ⁸

It is important to know how much alcohol is in your drink. Different drinks have different amounts of alcohol. Because of this, each type of drink has its own “standard serving” that contains one serving of alcohol:

- 12 ounces of regular beer
- 8-9 ounces of malt liquor
- 5 ounces of wine (including red wine, white wine, rosé, etc.)
- 1.5 ounces of distilled spirits (such as vodka, tequila, rum, whiskey, etc.)

Safety tips:

- Never drink and drive.
- Plan ahead before drinking so you know how you will get home safely.
- Don't drink on an empty stomach.
- If you are taking medication, check with your health care provider before drinking alcohol.
- Stay hydrated - drink plenty of water.
- Count your drinks; be aware of standard serving sizes.
- Switch between drinks with alcohol and drinks without.
- Pour your own drinks.
- Talk to your health care provider if you're worried about your drinking.

Myths:

Drinking coffee will sober you up. This is not true. Only time can sober a person up. Coffee might make you feel more awake, but it won't lower your blood alcohol content (BAC).⁹

Beer has less alcohol than liquor. If you compare beer to liquor ounce by ounce, yes, beer has less alcohol in it than hard liquor like vodka or tequila. However, when you look at standard serving sizes, one 12-ounce bottle of beer has the same amount of alcohol as a standard shot of 80-proof liquor or 5 ounces of wine.¹⁰

Everyone reacts to alcohol the same way. There are many things that can affect a person's reaction to alcohol, including (but not limited to) body weight, metabolism, tolerance level, biological sex, and medication use.¹¹ Trying to “keep up” with your friends is not a safe idea; your body will metabolize alcohol at a different pace than them. Know your limits and make the choices that feel right for you.

The biggest consequence of drinking is a bad hangover the next day. While hangovers are indeed horrible, there are a number of other consequences to risky alcohol use, including: ¹²

- Injuries including car accidents, falls, and drowning
- Alcohol poisoning, which can be deadly
- Increased risk of violence and unsafe sexual behaviors
- Increased risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and liver disease
- Negative effects on relationships, school, and work
- Alcohol dependence

Everyone plays a role in preventing FASD:

- If you can become pregnant, talk with your care provider about preventing an alcohol exposed pregnancy.
- If you are a health care provider, take every opportunity to have conversations with patients about alcohol use before and during pregnancy.
- Become an advocate for change as it relates to alcohol policies in your community and state.
- Learn more about FASD and how you can support those impacted by this disorder at proofalliance.org.

Sources:

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