

Strategy: If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation (i.e., for most people, the general guideline is no more than one drink a day for women and no more than two drinks a day for men).

Canadian guidelines for moderate drinking are based on a review of research related to alcohol and health conducted in 1997 by a team of Canadian researchers from institutions including the University of Toronto and the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). The guidelines were reviewed and confirmed in 2003.

The consensus guidelines that emerged from that process are as follows:

- **Males:** No more than two drinks a day, and up to no more than a total of 14 drinks a week
- **Females:** One drink a day or no more than nine drinks a week

One drink is defined as a 12 ounce (341 ml) serving of beer, a 5 ounce (142 ml) glass of wine or a 1.5 ounce (43 ml) shot of spirits.

Low-risk drinking guidelines are designed to minimize the risks of potential negative health impacts of alcohol use. The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines web site states, "For the average healthy person who stays within both the daily and weekly limits, the risk of developing alcohol dependence is low."

It is important to note that the risks associated with alcohol consumption can vary from person to person depending on various factors such as age, health status, what medications a person may be taking and whether or not there is a family history of alcoholism.

For more information about low-risk drinking guidelines, link to:

<http://www.lrdg.net/guidelines.html>.

Potential Benefits of Moderate Drinking

It is well known that heavy habitual drinking comes with a number of risks, including:

- Risk of injury and/or injury to others while intoxicated
- Risk of damage to personal relationships and/or careers
- Increased risk of certain diseases including alcoholic cirrhosis of the liver, certain cancers, and heart disease

Over the past 20 years, however, there have been many media stories on reported health benefits of *moderate* drinking, particularly with respect to red wine.

According to David Hanson (Ph.D.), a sociologist who has researched alcohol use for over 40 years, medical research suggests that moderate drinking is associated with a number of reduced health risks:

- Lower risk of dying from coronary heart disease
- 50% lower risk of stroke
- 54% less chance of developing dementia
- 30 – 40% reduced risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes

Moderate drinking has also been associated with reduced risk of gall and kidney stones, digestive ailments, erectile dysfunction, Parkinson's disease, rheumatoid arthritis and certain kinds of cancers (Hanson).

However, it's wise to view these health benefits with caution. For example, the documented heart health benefits of alcohol use apply mainly to people over the age of 45 (Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines). Younger people, who have very low rates of heart disease, do have high rates of alcohol-related deaths and injuries.

So in the end, it's not clear that it would make sense for abstainers or infrequent drinkers to start drinking one or two drinks a day to improve their health. Low-risk drinking guidelines are designed primarily to reduce the risk of alcohol abuse.

Tips for moderate drinking

- Pay attention to how much you drink
- Pace your drinks over an evening
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic drinks such as mineral water, soft drinks, or non-alcoholic cocktails
- Take sips of water in between sips of your alcoholic drink

Tips for Cutting Down on Alcohol Consumption

- Keep less (or no) alcohol in the house
- Learn to say "no" when you don't really want or need another drink
- Spend less time with people who drink a lot

Is My Drinking A Problem?

Alcohol abuse can be defined as "a pattern of drinking resulting in harm to people's health (includes mental health), relationships, and careers." Deciding whether or not you have a drinking problem requires an honest and thorough evaluation of your drinking pattern and the impact it may be having on various aspects of your life, including how it affects the people around you. A number of web sites provide online tools and questionnaires to help assess your drinking. CAMH has developed an online "Check Your Drinking Survey" to help individuals assess their alcohol consumption pattern. Click here for more information:

http://camh.alcoholhelpcenter.net/cyd/CYDScreenerP1_0.aspx

Another self-assessment tool, located on the web site maintained by David Hanson, professor Emeritus of Sociology at the State University of New York at Potsdam, takes a slightly different approach. Dr. Hanson offers a set of questions designed to help people assess their own behaviours which might signal the *potential* for problem drinking. Click here for more information:

<http://www2.potsdam.edu/hansondj/DrinkTooMuch.html>

Need Help?

All communities and regions have resources and agencies available to assist people with drinking problems, including the well-known “Alcoholics Anonymous” groups and various other community-based professional services. To find help, ask your family doctor, or look in your Yellow Pages under “Addiction Information and Treatment”, “Alcoholism”, or “Alcoholics Anonymous.”

A directory of Canadian drug rehab programs, including programs related to alcohol abuse is also available online. For more information, link to:

<http://www.canadiandrugrehabcentres.com/> .

References:

David Hanson (Ph.D.) Web site:

<http://www2.potsdam.edu/hansondj/HealthIssues/1107279468.html>

Low Risk Drinking Guidelines, Alcohol Policy Network Association:

<http://www.lrdg.net/guidelines.html>

Additional Resources:

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:

<http://www.camh.net/>