

Visit 19 - Risks of Continued Drinking

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?



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Short-Term Health Risks:

- Injuries, such as motor vehicle crashes, falls, drownings, and burns.
- Violence, including homicide, suicide, sexual assault, and intimate partner violence.
- Alcohol poisoning, a medical emergency that results from high blood alcohol levels.
- Risky sexual behaviors, including unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners. These behaviors can result in unintended pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.
- Miscarriage and stillbirth or [fetal alcohol spectrum disorders \(FASDs\)](https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/states/excessive-alcohol-use-united-states.html) among pregnant women.

<https://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/fact-sheets/states/excessive-alcohol-use-united-states.html>

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Long-Term Health Risks:

- High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, and digestive problems.
- Cancer of the breast, mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, and colon.
- Learning and memory problems, including dementia and poor school performance.
- Mental health problems, including depression and anxiety.
- Social problems, including lost productivity, family problems, and unemployment.
- Alcohol dependence, or alcoholism.

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Options for reducing alcohol-related risks include:

- Staying within the [limits provided in the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#). If you need to cut down, see [Tips to try](#).
- Taking steps to be safe when you drink (see box, below).
- Quitting drinking altogether. See [Choose your approach](#).



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Take Steps to be Safe:

- Alcohol is a factor in many motor vehicle crashes, falls, burns, drownings, suicides, homicides, sexual assaults, and transfers of sexually transmitted infections. If you choose to drink, then take whatever steps necessary to avoid putting yourself or others at risk for harm.
- Take precautions. Have a designated driver or take a cab. Use protection for sex. Don't use machinery, walk in a dangerous area, swim, or drive a boat during or after drinking. Don't drink if you're pregnant or could become pregnant. You get the idea: Be safe.

<https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-is-too-much/whats-the-harm/How-Can-You-Reduce-Your-Risks.aspx>

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?

Injuries

Alcohol use increases your chances of being injured or even killed.

Alcohol is a factor, for example, in about 60 percent of fatal burn injuries, drownings, and homicides; 50 percent of severe trauma injuries and sexual assaults; and 40 percent of fatal motor vehicle crashes, suicides, and fatal falls.

<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-too-much/what-are-consequences>

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?

Health Problems

Drinking can cause a number of health problems and is associated with over 200 diseases and injury-related conditions. Studies have shown that one drink a day increases the risk of breast cancer in women.

Research has also shown that alcohol misuse increases the risk of liver disease, cardiovascular diseases, depression, and stomach bleeding, as well as cancers of the oral cavity, esophagus, larynx, pharynx, liver, colon, and rectum.

<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-too-much/what-are-consequences>

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?

Health Problems Continued

Drinking can also contribute to problems managing conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, pain, and sleep disorders. And people who drink are more likely to engage in unsafe sexual behavior, putting themselves and others at risk for sexually transmitted diseases and unintentional pregnancies.

<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-too-much/what-are-consequences>

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?

Birth Defects

Prenatal alcohol exposure can result in brain damage and other serious problems in the baby. The effects are known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, or FASD, and can result in lifelong physical, cognitive, and behavioral problems. Because it is not yet known whether any amount of alcohol is safe for a developing baby, women who are pregnant or may become pregnant should not drink.

<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-too-much/what-are-consequences>

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Alcohol Use Disorder

Alcohol use disorder is a medical condition that doctors can diagnose when a patient's drinking interferes with their daily life.

Some signs are:

- Continuing to drink even though it is causing trouble with your family or at work
- Drinking more than you intended
- Having to drink more than before to get a desired effect
- Being unable to stop drinking after repeated attempts
- Continuing to drink even though it makes you feel depressed or anxious.
- Any of these symptoms may be a cause for concern. The more symptoms one has, the more urgent the need for change.

<https://rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-too-much/what-are-consequences>

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Alcohol Use Disorder Continued

Beyond these physical and mental health risks, frequent heavy drinking also is linked with personal problems, including losing a driver's license and having relationship troubles.

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Why do Women Face Higher Risks?

Studies show that women start to have alcohol-related problems sooner and at lower drinking levels than men do and for multiple reasons. On average, women weigh less than men. Also, alcohol resides predominantly in body water, and pound for pound, women have less water in their bodies than men.

<https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Is-your-drinking-pattern-risky/Health-Risks-Women.aspx>

What Risks Do I Face if I Continue Drinking?

Why do Women Face Higher Risks?

This means that after a woman and a man of the same weight drink the same amount of alcohol, the woman's blood alcohol concentration (BAC, the amount of alcohol in the blood) will tend to be higher, putting her at greater risk for harm. Other biological differences may contribute as well.

<https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/Is-your-drinking-pattern-risky/Health-Risks-Women.aspx>