



### About Alcohol Use

#### Fact:

People who both smoke and drink multiply their risks of certain cancers.

#### Fiction:

It's a myth that studies on preventing heart disease gave a green light to drinking.

### Possible Benefits with Limited Use

If alcohol provides health benefits, it does so only in these amounts:

- For most women, up to one drink per day (one beer, four to five ounces of wine or one ounce of hard liquor)
- For most men, up to two drinks per day

A doctor can provide an opinion on how much, if any, alcohol is "safe" for a particular individual.

### How Alcohol Works

With an alcoholic drink, some alcohol is absorbed almost immediately through the lining of the stomach. The rest is broken down by enzymes in the stomach or absorbed from the small intestines into the blood stream.

The liver breaks down substances that pass through the body, including alcohol. The more alcohol is consumed, the greater the likelihood that the liver will experience damage as it processes the alcohol.

### Health Risks of Alcohol

Alcohol use endangers the liver, and the dangers increase with tobacco use. Early signs of damage include alcoholic hepatitis, which is inflammation of liver tissue that may produce nausea and vomiting. Another early sign of damage is a fatty liver.

Liver damage reverses if drinking is stopped soon, and the liver can regenerate somewhat. But once damage causes scarring and cirrhosis of the liver, it is irreversible. Cirrhosis can lead to liver failure, which is fatal unless a liver transplant can be performed.

When the liver is busy processing large amounts of alcohol, many drugs will not metabolize properly. For example, Tylenol used by someone with liver damage can reach toxic doses with few symptoms until the liver fails.

The tobacco-alcohol combination also increases the risk of certain gastrointestinal tract cancers and doubles the risk of cancers of the mouth, esophagus, larynx and pharynx.\*

Rectal and colon cancer may also be related to alcohol consumption.

Alcohol weakens or relaxes the lower esophageal sphincter, which should remain closed except during swallowing. Heartburn can develop as the weakened

sphincter allows acidic stomach contents to flow upwards into the esophagus. Alcohol can also promote peptic ulcers or interfere with their healing. Many doctors recommend that individuals with ulcers avoid drinking at all.

Alcohol increases accidents while driving, on the job and at home. And, in the case of alcoholism, alcohol jeopardizes more than health, putting self-esteem, relationships and the drinker's livelihood at risk.

\* IntelliHealth

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