

For Your Health:

# The Link Between Alcohol and Cancer

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At this time of year, when we all turn the calendar page on the old year and welcome in a new one, it is typical for people to take stock and make resolutions to improve their health and well-being.

For many, this process has come to include examining their habits around alcohol consumption and making a change... at least for a month or so. This practice was recently given new weight and urgency when the U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy, issued his 2025 Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk. In the Advisory, Dr. Murthy outlines research that indicates alcohol consumption is linked to an increased risk of developing at least seven different types of cancer, including mouth, throat, voice box, esophagus, breast (in women), liver, and colorectal cancers.

The link between alcohol and cancer is not new. In fact, alcohol consumption is the third leading preventable cause of cancer in the United States, after tobacco and obesity. However, the Surgeon General's report illustrates that there is a higher degree of cancer risk linked to alcohol use than previously thought.

Not only does it make clear that drinking increases the likelihood of developing certain cancers, but it also underscores that it's not just heavy drinking that can cause increased cancer risk; even moderate drinking, previously thought to be relatively harmless, can do so as well.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (also known as "the CDC"), moderate drinking is defined as up to two drinks per day for men and up to one drink per day for women. For men, drinking two alcoholic beverages a day, or 14 drinks per week, raises the risk of developing an alcohol-related cancer to 13.1%. Similarly, for women, consuming one alcoholic beverage a day, or 7 drinks per week, increases the risk of cancer of an alcohol-related cancer to 19.0%. Overall, alcohol use is estimated to contribute to nearly 100,000 cancer cases and approximately 20,000 cancer-related deaths per year.

Surveys indicate that approximately 72% of U.S. adults consume one or more alcoholic drinks per week, which means 72% of U.S. adults have an opportunity to improve their health and decrease their cancer risk by drinking less.

The CDC recommends the following tips if you want to start drinking less:

- Start by setting limits. Decide how many days per week you'll drink and how many drinks you'll have each day. For instance, one could decide that they will allow themselves one drink on each day of the weekend.
- Schedule alcohol-free days and track your drinks to stay within your goals.
- Avoid people, places, or activities that tend to involve drinking, like "happy hour" gatherings, and swap them out for sober activities like lunch dates and nature walks.
- Remove alcohol from your home and seek support from friends, family, or health professionals to make it easier to stick to your plan.

The Surgeon General's Advisory on Alcohol and Cancer Risk serves as both an education and an invitation.

Whether you've committed to "Dry January," are exploring a lifestyle without alcohol year-round, or simply want to drink a little less, the start of a new year offers the perfect opportunity to align your habits with your health goals. By understanding the risks associated with alcohol, and making informed decisions about your own consumption, you can take a truly meaningful step toward a healthier you.

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The Healthcare Consortium is a non-profit organization with a mission of improving access to healthcare and supporting the health and well-being of the residents in our rural community. The agency is located at 325 Columbia St. in Hudson. For more information: visit [www.columbiahealthnet.org](http://www.columbiahealthnet.org) or call 518-822-8820.