

Alcohol: New Limits

We have new guidelines on the safe limits of alcohol:

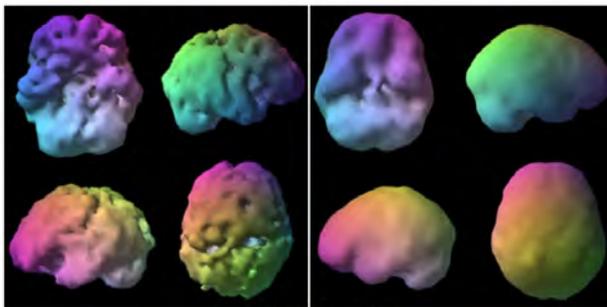
- No more than one standard drink per day (on average), and no more than 3 drinks on any given day.
- People should have 2-3 drink-free days each week to allow their liver to recover.
- Drink alcohol slowly, and drink it along with plenty of water.

A standard drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits. For the rarer drinks, it's 8.5 ounces of malt liquor, 3.5 ounces of fortified wine, and 2.5 ounces of cordial, liqueur or aperitif. What that all translates to is 14 grams of pure alcohol.

Compared to the old guidelines, which were developed in the 1980s, these new limits are stricter for men and about the same for women. The old guidelines allowed men to drink double that amount, based on the fact that they metabolize alcohol twice as quickly. However, new data on the health risks have caused doctors to reexamine those numbers.

Staying below these new limits would save 20 in 1,000 people from cancer. High blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, and liver disease are among the other reasons to keep within the new limits.

Simply put, going beyond those numbers is likely to be toxic to your brain and body over the long term. The pictures below, which come from PET scans taken by Dr. Daniel Amen, show what this toxicity looks like in the brain:



Alcoholic Brain / Normal Brain

These safe limits may be even lower for people who have suffered from alcohol addiction, who are over age 65 or who have medical problems.

Alcohol's Effects on the Body

Drinking too much – on a single occasion or over time – can take a serious toll on your health. Here's how alcohol can affect your body:

Brain: Dementia (memory loss), depression, psychosis, seizures, poor coordination. These effects can be due to intoxication but can also set in permanently.

Heart: Cardiomyopathy (stretching and drooping of heart muscle), arrhythmias (irregular heart beat), stroke, high blood pressure.

Liver: Potentially fatal liver inflammations including: steatosis (fatty liver), hepatitis, fibrosis, cirrhosis.

Stomach: Heart-burn, gastritis, ulcers, chronic diarrhea.

Pancreas: Alcohol causes the pancreas to produce toxic substances that can eventually lead to pancreatitis, a dangerous inflammation and swelling of the blood vessels in the pancreas that prevents proper digestion. It also raises the risk of diabetes.

Cancer: In the mouth, esophagus, throat, liver, colon and breast.

Immune System: Drinking too much can weaken your immune system, making your body an easier target for infections like pneumonia and tuberculosis. Alcohol slows your ability to ward off infections for up to 24 hours after getting drunk.

Sexual: feminization in men from high estrogen levels (leading to male breasts and smaller testes), infertility, sexual dysfunction.

Other: weakened bones, anemia, cough, painful gout (arthritis), muscle cramps.

Liquid Calories

Alcohol packs a lot of hidden calories, which are oddly never listed on the bottle:

Drink	Calories
Beer (12 oz)	153
Light beer (12 oz)	103
Gin, rum, vodka, whiskey, tequila (1.5 oz)	92
Brandy, cognac (1.5 oz)	98
Liqueurs (1.5 oz)	165
Red wine (5 oz)	125
White wine (5 oz)	121
Sweet wine (3.5 oz)	165
Sherry (2 oz)	75
Port (2 oz)	90
Champagne (4 oz)	84
Vermouth, sweet (3 oz)	140
Vermouth, dry (3 oz)	105
Martini (2.25 oz)	124
Martini (extra dry) (2.25 oz)	139
Cosmopolitan (2.75 oz)	146
Mojito (6 oz)	143
Margarita (4 oz)	168
Piña Colada (9 oz)	490
Manhattan (3.5 oz)	164
Daquiri (2 oz)	112
Whiskey sour (3.5 oz)	160

On YouTube

The research was summarized well in this BBC documentary: *The Truth About Alcohol*
www.youtube.com/watch?v=IposJ9hxc4A

Podcast

What Alcohol Does to Your Body, Brain & Health by Andrew Huberman, August 2022

Apps

Intellidrink. Allows you to monitor your alcohol intake and estimates your blood alcohol content by drink.

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 7/1/2025