

# Alcohol and Smoking

[gethearthealthy.ca/alcohol-your-health](http://gethearthealthy.ca/alcohol-your-health)  
[gethearthealthy.ca/smoking-your-health](http://gethearthealthy.ca/smoking-your-health)

In this section you will learn:

- The current alcohol consumption guidelines
- How heavy alcohol consumption and smoke exposure impact your cardiovascular health
- Strategies to reduce smoke exposure

## Alcohol Consumption Guidelines

- All levels of alcohol consumption are associated with some risk, so drinking less is best
- The risk of negative outcomes increases with increased consumption. If consuming more than two standard drinks per week, most individuals will have an increased risk of injury or health concerns
- Alcohol can impact the way medications work within the body. Alcohol may cause medications to become less effective, or dangerously toxic. Speak with your pharmacist or healthcare provider before consuming alcohol

## What is Considered a Standard Drink?



5 ounces of wine  
≤12% alcohol



12 ounces of beer  
≤5% alcohol



1.5 ounces of distilled  
spirits (whiskey, gin, vodka,  
etc.)

## Impacts of Heavy Alcohol Consumption on Cardiovascular Health

### Increased Risk of Cardiovascular Disease

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased LDL cholesterol and triglyceride levels
- Reduced HDL cholesterol levels
- Increased risk of stroke, heart failure and arrhythmias

Heavy alcohol consumption weakens and thins the heart muscle, affecting its ability to pump blood efficiently.

### Weight Gain and Increased Waist Circumference

- Increased waist circumference and unhealthy weight gain
- Many alcoholic beverages and their associated sweeteners and mixes, are high in calories and low in nutritional value
- Increased appetite and tendency to make poor food choices

## Uncontrolled Blood Sugar Levels

- Increased risk of developing diabetes
- Impaired ability to regulate blood sugar levels; alcohol can cause serious fluctuations in blood sugar levels, depending on the type of medications you are taking

## Smoking

- Smoking tobacco harms almost every organ in the body, including the heart, blood vessels, and lungs
- Smoking cannabis has similar physical health concerns as smoking tobacco
- Non-smokers who are regularly exposed to second-hand smoke increase their risk of developing cardiovascular disease by 25-30 per cent
- Quitting smoking is the single most important thing you can do for your health

After one year of being smoke-free, your risk of having a heart attack is reduced by 50 per cent.

## Smoking Cessation Strategies



**Develop an action plan:** Make a list of reasons why you want to become smoke-free. What do you like about smoking? What do you not like about smoking? When/where do you typically smoke? What triggers you to smoke?

**Medication:** Nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) provides a safe and clean delivery of nicotine to reduce the symptoms of nicotine withdrawal. Nicotine replacement therapies come in many forms such as patches, gums, and lozenges. Prescription medications, such as varenicline (Champix) or bupropion (Zyban) can reduce symptoms of nicotine cravings and withdrawal.

**Learn a new skill or behaviour:** Try new activities to replace smoking.

**Create smoke-free spaces:** Make certain spaces, such as your home or car, smoke-free.

**Be prepared for withdrawals:** It is normal to experience withdrawal symptoms and cravings. Learning to live smoke-free takes practice. If you have a slip, think about what you could do differently. Remind your friends, family and co-workers that you are trying to quit.

**Counselling:** Speak with a professional to get information and support to improve your long-term success of becoming smoke-free. Speak with your Exercise Therapist if you would like access to smoking cessation services and resources.

Notes: