



## Challenge Yourself: Drink Wise Low-Risk Alcohol

Welcome to **Drink Wise**, the first issue of the three part **Challenge Yourself** series. The goal of this series is to provide you with information, resource links, and practical tips on how to make healthy choices and take preventative actions to support your health and the health of those around you. This *Health Issues Newsletter* focuses on helping you rethink the way you drink alcoholic beverages and better understand how this affects your health.

From a beer after the big game, to a toast at a family wedding, alcohol is ever-present in our society. In fact, since 1996, there has been a 14 percent increase in alcohol consumed by Canadians (Butt, et al., 2011). Research has also shown that people often underestimate the actual amount alcoholic beverages they drink (Stockwell, Zhao, & Macdonald, 2014). These facts are concerning, as excessive alcohol consumption has been linked to more than 200 different diseases and injuries (WHO, 2014).

Making informed decisions about your drinking habits will go a long way in helping you live a healthy life. Read on for information on the risks associated with alcohol use and the following *Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*.

### Understanding the Influence

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It is not uncommon to hear about people using alcohol as a way to unwind and de-stress after a long day at work. Recent research suggests that nearly 40% of Canadians drink during the work week with 66% of drinks consumed in the evenings (Boseveld, 2015). With so many people choosing to drink when they may have to report for work or other engagements the next day, it's important to know that the effects of alcohol can last a lot longer than most people believe. In fact, it's possible to still be over the legal limit of blood alcohol content (BAC) hours later, even the



next morning, depending on how much alcohol you drank and when you had your last drink.

## **BAC Facts**

As soon as you start drinking alcohol your BAC starts to rise and will continue to rise until you stop. Once you stop drinking and your liver breaks down the alcohol, your BAC will eventually start to drop. In general, it takes about 1.5 hours to remove one standard drink from your body (CAMH, 2012). This rate varies from person to person. For example, a healthy male weighing 70 kg (154 lbs), after having six standard sized drinks with the last drink at 1 a.m., would still have a blood alcohol concentration of approximately 0.065g/100mL when he reports for work at 7a.m. the next morning (CAMH, 2012). Driving motor vehicles at this BAC level is illegal under most provincial traffic acts.

## **Did You Know?**

Taking a shower, drinking coffee, jogging, or napping won't help you sober up faster. The only thing that can help is time!

## **Alcohol and Work –A Bad Mix**

Workplace substance misuse policies often ban working under the influence of alcohol because of the increased health and safety risk that impairment creates. Excessive alcohol consumption and the multiplying effects of hangovers can result in missing work, lost wages and even possible job loss (Howland *et al.*, 2010). It can also lead to mental health issues and strained relationships with coworkers and supervisors (CAMH, 2012).

## **Drink Wise**

Drinking too much alcohol in the evening can have spillover effects into the next day affecting your health, safety, performance, and job security. The best way to avoid the risks associated with arriving to work impaired is to not drink alcohol at all. However, if you do choose to drink, limit your



alcohol intake to no more than 2 drinks/day or 10 drinks/week for women and 3 drinks/day or 15 drinks/week for men. It's important to make sure you include more alcohol-free days in your week than days on which you consume alcohol.

## **What are Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines?**

Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRADGs) are a set of recommendations to help Canadians make informed decisions about alcohol consumption. There is no level of drinking alcohol that can be guaranteed to be completely 'safe' or 'no risk'. Rather, for those who choose to drink alcohol these guidelines provide recommended limits on the amount of alcohol one should consume daily and weekly, in order to minimize the immediate and long-term risks of alcohol (e.g., alcohol-related accidents, injuries, chronic diseases).

Did you Know - If all Canadian drinkers consume alcohol within the LRADGs, it is estimated that alcohol-related deaths would be reduced by 4,600 per year approximately (Butt et al., 2011).

Choose your Numbers - Start to think about responsible drinking in a new way: 0-2-3-10-15. In other words, to have zero risk, a person must not drink any alcohol (0). For anyone of legal age who chooses to drink, the guidelines recommend no more than two standard drinks a day or 10 per week for women. Men should have no more than three standard drinks a day or 15 per week. Everyone should plan to have more non-drinking days in their week than days on which alcohol is consumed.

Keep Special Occasions Special! The LRADGs recognize that there are certain special occasions that may be associated with increased alcohol consumption. On these every- now- and - then occasions, women may choose to have up to three drinks on that day and men may choose up to four drinks. These instances should be considered as "special occasions", and occur infrequently. And, when these occasions do occur, remember to still stay within your weekly limits.



## **Don't Drink At All!**

It's important to remember that there are some situations where alcohol should be avoided all together. For example, when you are:

- Pregnant
- Planning to be pregnant
- Are alcohol dependent
- Driving a vehicle
- Using machinery and tool
- Taking medicine or other drugs that interact with alcohol
- Under the age of majority
- Responsible for the safety of others

If you don't drink, don't start. If you drink, don't exceed the LRADGs. The LRADGs help to promote a culture of moderation and help to reduce the many negative effects of excess alcohol consumption.

## **The High Cost of Alcohol**

Alcohol is part of our society – for better or for worse. It is a legal, regulated product in Canada and it is the most commonly used of all substances. Alcohol is consumed by over 75% of Canadian adults and in most cases is used occasionally and in moderation. Unfortunately for others, alcohol misuse is a major risk factor for many health and social conditions. Even small amounts of alcohol increase the risk for certain types of cancers, while moderate consumption of alcohol can lead to impairment, injuries, and violence (Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse [CCSA], 2014).

The estimated cost associated with alcohol-related harm to Canadians is \$14.6 billion per year.

This cost is made up in part of lost productivity due to disability and early death, health care costs, and direct law enforcement costs (Rehm, et al., 2006).



### **Did you know?**

- After high blood pressure and smoking, alcohol use is the third leading cause of the global burden of disease and injury (Centre for Addiction & Mental Health, 2013).
- In 2011, alcohol represented more than half (56%) of all hospital in-patient visits that were related to substance abuse.
- For many years, driving impaired (by alcohol) has been the most common criminal offence in Canada (CCSA, 2014).

The Good News: Well-designed programs and policies can reduce alcohol-related harms in our population – even for the most at-risk drinkers (Giesbrecht, et al., 2013).

We all play a part in reducing harm caused by alcohol use.

As an individual you can ensure that you and those you influence know and follow Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRADGs).

As a host when alcohol is served, ensure that your guests are not over served, have non-alcoholic beverage options, and that guests who drink alcohol don't drive a motor vehicle.

As a parent you should talk to your children and teens about the potential harms related to drinking and set an example by being responsible about your own use of alcohol. You can even have a family alcohol policy which can help outline the rules related to alcohol use and the consequences of not following them.

As an employer you have the opportunity and responsibility to support employees in making healthy decisions around alcohol use. Hosting information sessions about the negative effects of alcohol use, having a well-communicated, comprehensive workplace alcohol policy in place, and providing access to an employee assistance program are great ways for an employer to support safe and responsible relations with alcohol.

Given the high prevalence of alcohol use in our society and the risk of harm associated with it, we all should do our part to manage alcohol consumption and use at home, work, and in other community settings.



## **Cultural and Societal Implications of Alcohol Use in Canada**

Given the nature of our multicultural society, viewpoints on alcohol use are quite variable. Some cultures view alcohol as an important part of social norms, customs, rituals, and traditions. In these cultures, alcohol is viewed as a part of being social, having fun, and enjoying friends. They think that alcohol makes socializing easier and use it as a way to unwind or celebrate milestones with family and friends. However, other cultures avoid alcohol completely. In some situations, there can be serious social or legal consequences for drinking alcohol, due to laws, regulations or cultural and religious norms. For example, alcohol use for most Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Baptists, and Mormons is not permitted as they view offering or drinking alcohol to be disrespectful (WHO, 2014). Understanding different views is important since according to Statistics Canada, in 2011 over two million people reported being a part of the Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Buddhist religions in Canada.

## **Social Norms, Values, and Traditions**

We are typically influenced by the behavior of those we spend time with so if they don't drink alcohol, drink in moderation, or drink excessively, we are more likely to adopt that pattern too (Lee & Kotler, 2011). In many cultures, it is acceptable to offer alcohol to help celebrate important milestones such as christenings, coming-of-age, graduation ceremonies, engagement, weddings, and anniversaries. While many believe that drinking alcohol is the societal norm, the reality is that Canada is a diverse population and approximately 10.3% of Canadians of legal drinking age choose not to drink (Health Canada, 2011). This is something to keep in mind if you are thinking of including alcohol as a part of an event (e.g., offering alcohol, giving out alcohol as door prizes) as this may offend some people and make others feel uncomfortable.

Pull out section: Some Canadians choose not to consume alcohol at all. Having a wide variety of beverages that don't contain alcohol available can help make everyone feel comfortable and welcome at an event.





## How to be an Inclusive Event Host

You should plan to host an event that is inclusive of people who choose not to drink alcohol. Here are some strategies on how you can make your guests feel included as part of any celebration.

- Do not focus on alcohol in the invitation or promotion of the event.
- Offer a wide selection of non- alcoholic drinks.
- Be respectful of an individual's decision to not drink.
- Choose not to use alcohol to recognize individuals or accomplishments.
- Make sure that there are pitchers of water on tables so that when raising a glass for a toast everyone is able to participate. This is also a great way to support folks who choose to drink alcohol, to do so responsibly.

To help everyone feel respected and included take the focus off of alcohol at events that you help plan, organize or host.

## Think Before You Drink and Drive

Drinking and driving is not only illegal, it is also socially unacceptable. Despite the many warnings and dangers, hundreds of Canadians are killed every year due to crashes related to impaired driving. In fact, every day approximately four Canadians are killed and 175 are injured due to drinking and driving (MADD Canada, 2013). The majority (68%) of those involved in these crashes are males between the ages of 18 and 35. Knowing your limits and refraining from drinking and driving can save your life, and the lives of others.

## Blood Alcohol Concentration

The current maximum legal blood alcohol concentration (BAC) in Canada is 0.08 (80 milligrams of alcohol in 100 millilitres of blood), although many provinces have their own laws with lower maximum BAC levels. In addition,



many provinces and territories have set a BAC of 0.00 for drivers under the legal drinking age. Penalties are severe for those who choose to drink and drive. If you test over the legal limit, you may be charged a fine between \$1000 and \$2000, and could serve up to three years in prison for your first offence. Additional offences bring even stricter penalties. For example, a first-time offence of drinking and driving causing bodily harm can carry up to 10 years in prison, while causing death could lead to a lifetime sentence (Department of Justice, 2015).

**Pull out:** The best method to ensure your BAC is below the legal limit is to abstain from alcohol completely. If you do choose to drink, it is important to remember that it will take about one and a half hours for one standard drink to leave your system (Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012).

\*As discussed with Lead Editors, we will determine where best to fit the diagram of what one standard drink consists of and readers will be redirected there

### **If You Plan to Drink- Have a Plan to Get Home Safely**

- Make your transportation plans prior to beginning to drink
- Take turns with friends being a designated driver
- Keep the phone number of a taxi company with you so you will have quick access when it's time to go home
- Ask a friend if you can stay overnight instead of traveling home

### **Did You Know?**

Impaired driving is an offense under Canada's Criminal Code, yet, over the last ten years, drinking and driving rates have remained stable. Driving while under the influence is preventable and refusing to get behind the wheel after drinking is the only way to ensure you keep yourself and others safe.