



Alcohol and Heart Disease

Something you may not have thought about that can affect your heart is alcohol. Drinking too much—on a single occasion or over time—can take a serious toll on your health. More African Americans than whites don't drink. But African Americans who do drink consume more, do more binge drinking, and are more likely to develop alcohol-related liver disease.

How Alcohol Affects Your Heart

Long-term alcohol misuse is a leading cause of heart disease.

Alcohol can increase your risk of:

- High blood pressure
- Arrhythmias, which are an irregular heart rhythm or rate. Even modest amounts of alcohol can trigger atrial fibrillation, a common type of arrhythmia, in some people.
- Stroke
- Alcoholic cardiomyopathy, which is when the heart muscle becomes enlarged, thick, or rigid
- Heart failure, which is when the heart can't pump enough blood to meet the body's needs

Alcohol also affects your brain, liver, pancreas, immune system, and increases your risk of cancer.

Is Any Alcohol Okay?

Many people should not drink alcohol. Some medications and medical conditions make drinking alcohol more risky. Pregnant women shouldn't drink and older people need to consider that aging lowers their tolerance for alcohol. If you have concerns about your health and alcohol use, talk with your health care provider.

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so only in moderation. That means no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. To learn more about what is a typical drink or how much alcohol is in different drinks, go to www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.





Alcohol and Heart Disease (continued)

The Danger of Alcohol for Women

Women are more susceptible to alcohol-related heart disease than men are, even though they may consume less alcohol over their lifetime. One reason is that women generally weigh less than men and have less water in their body, so their blood alcohol levels get higher with less alcohol.

For women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant, it's important not to drink. Alcohol in the mother's blood passes to the fetus. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can cause a miscarriage or stillbirth. It can also cause the baby to have lifelong physical, behavioral, and intellectual disabilities, known as fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.

For more information

Visit the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism website at www.niaaa.nih.gov for more information on alcohol and health.

For tips and tools to better understand your drinking patterns and for help to cut back if necessary, visit Rethinking Drinking at www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.

For immediate help see www.asam.org or www.alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov.