

## Update of Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: Source Guidelines

In July 2020, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA) received funding from Health Canada to build on the 2016 alcohol guidelines from the United Kingdom (U.K. Chief Medical Officers, 2016) and the 2020 Australian guidelines to reduce health risks (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2020) to update the Canadian Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (Butt, Beirness, Gliksman, Paradis, & Stockwell, 2011). Several countries have issued recommendations for alcohol consumption in recent years but the United Kingdom and Australia have provided access to the underlying evidence base supporting their alcohol guidelines. Hence, they facilitate the use of the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) Adaptation, Adoption, De Novo Development (ADOLOPMENT) framework (Schünemann et al., 2017), a well-accepted and transparent approach for developing guidelines in an efficient manner.

This document summarizes the previous Canadian LRDGs, the United Kingdom alcohol guidelines and the Australian guidelines to reduce health risks. Additional information is available in the report, [Update of Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: Evaluation of Selected Guidelines](#).

### Recommendations of the 2011 Canadian LRDGs, the 2016 from the United Kingdom alcohol guidelines and the 2020 Australian guidelines to reduce health risks

	2011 Canada' Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines*	2016 United Kingdom Alcohol Guidelines*	2020 Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks*
<b>Weekly volume – Females</b>	No more than 10 Canadian standard drinks	No more than 14 units (8.3 Canadian standard drinks), spread evenly over three days or more	No more than 10 Australian standard drinks (7.4 Canadian standard drinks)
<b>Weekly volume – Males</b>	No more than 15 Canadian standard drinks	No more than 14 units (8.3 Canadian standard drinks), spread evenly over three days or more	No more than 10 Australian standard drinks (7.4 Canadian standard drinks)
<b>Daily quantity – Females</b>	No more than 2 Canadian standard drinks		No more than 4 Australian standard drinks (3 Canadian standard drinks)
<b>Daily quantity – Males</b>	No more than 3 Canadian standard drinks		No more than 4 Australian standard drinks (3 Canadian standard drinks)
<b>Special occasion – Females</b>	No more than 3 Canadian standard drinks **		
<b>Special occasion – Males</b>	No more than 4 Canadian standard drinks **		



<p><b>Youth – Females</b></p>	<p>Teens should delay drinking</p> <p>For teens who choose to drink, never more than 1-2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1-2 times per week</p>		<p>Children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol</p>
<p><b>Youth – Males</b></p>	<p>Teens should delay drinking</p> <p>For teens who choose to drink, never more than 1-2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1-2 times per week</p>		<p>Children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol</p>
<p><b>Women who are pregnant, planning a pregnancy</b></p>	<p>0 (also applies to women about to breastfeed)</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>0 (also applies to women who are breastfeeding)</p>
<p><b>Single occasion</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set limits for yourself and stick to them.</li> <li>• Drink slowly. Have no more than 2 drinks in any 3 hours.</li> <li>• For every drink of alcohol, have one non-alcoholic drink.</li> <li>• Eat before and while you are drinking.</li> <li>• Always consider your age, body weight and health problems that might suggest lower limits.</li> <li>• While drinking may provide health benefits for certain groups of people, do not start to drink or increase your drinking for health benefits.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limiting the total amount of alcohol you drink on any occasion;</li> <li>• Drinking more slowly, drinking with food, and alternating with water;</li> <li>• Avoiding risky places and activities, making sure you have people you know around, and ensuring you can get home safely.</li> <li>• Some groups of people are likely to be affected more by alcohol and should be more careful of their level of drinking on any one occasion:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ young adults</li> <li>○ older people</li> <li>○ those with low body weight</li> <li>○ those with other health problems</li> <li>○ those on medicines or other drugs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<p><b>Situations where cognitive ability and physical coordination should not be impaired (e.g., driving a vehicle, working, taking medicine)</b></p>	<p>0</p>	<p>0</p>	<p>Less is better</p>



<p>Other</p>	<p>Plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adopting alcohol free days may be a useful way for drinkers to moderate their consumption.</li><li>• The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) should be clear as a core message in future communications that the new guidelines are for 'low risk' drinking not 'safe' drinking. And that the vast majority of the population can reduce health risks further if they reduce drinking below the guideline levels, or do not drink at all.</li><li>• The CMO should publish a more extensive narrative about the basis for the new guidelines, and communicate clearly that:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ the risk of a number of cancers increases from any level of regular drinking;</li><li>○ there is good evidence that cardio-protective effects have previously been overestimated and there are substantial uncertainties around the level of protection still observed;</li><li>○ the net cardio-protective effects from mortality attributable to drinking regularly at low levels are likely to be limited in the UK to women over the age of 55.</li></ul></li><li>• Department of Health should work with health professionals and experts to review its guidance on higher risk drinking levels, in light of the new evidence underlying this report.</li><li>• Systematic research should be commissioned into the understanding, acceptability and uses of the new guidelines by the public, health professions and alcohol industry, including the impact of the supportive social marketing campaigns we recommend.</li></ul>	
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\* In Canada, one standard drink is 13.45 grams of pure alcohol. In the United Kingdom, one unit is 8 grams of pure alcohol. In Australia, one standard drink is 10 grams of pure alcohol.

\*\* Does not apply to youth (legal drinking age to 24 years old).

## References

Butt, P., Beirness, D., Gliksman, L., Paradis, C., & Stockwell, T. (2011). *Alcohol and health in Canada: A summary of evidence and guidelines for low risk drinking*. Ottawa, Ont.: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse.

Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction. (2021). *Update of Canada's Low Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines: Evaluation of selected guidelines*. Ottawa, Ont.: Author.

National Health and Medical Research Council. (2020). *Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol*. Canberra, Aust.: Author. Retrieved from <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-guidelines-reduce-health-risks-drinking-alcohol#block-views-block-file-attachments-content-block-1>

Schünemann, H. J., Wiercioch, W., Brozek, J., Etzeandia-Ikobaltzeta, I., Mustafa, R. A., Manja, V., . . . Akl, E. A. (2017). GRADE evidence to decision (EtD) frameworks for adoption, adaptation, and de novo development of trustworthy recommendations: GRADE-ADOLOPMENT. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 81, 101-110.

U.K. Chief Medical Officers. (2016). *UK Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines*. London, U.K.: Department of Health. Retrieved from [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/545937/UK\\_CMOs\\_\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545937/UK_CMOs__report.pdf)

