

Alcohol and Cancer: What The New Guidelines Mean

University of Colorado Cancer Center's dietician Valaree Williams, MS, RD, discusses the new American Cancer Society alcohol guidelines.

July 29, 2020 By Taylor Abarca

Any alcohol consumption is known to increase cancer risk.

The American Cancer Society recently updated its recommendation from limiting alcohol to avoiding alcohol altogether to reduce cancer risk. Here, the University of Colorado Cancer Center discusses this update with Valaree Williams, MS, RD, CSO, CNSC, FAND, lead dietician from the Oncology Supportive Services at UCHHealth.

Why is it important for patients with cancer to limit or avoid alcohol altogether?

Williams: The American Cancer Society Guideline for Diet and Physical Activity of Cancer Prevention state that it is best not to drink alcohol. For people who choose to drink alcohol, intake should be limited to 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink a day for women. You are likely asking why such a strict recommendation? Alcohol use is linked to increased risk for several cancers including cancers of the mouth, throat, voice box, esophagus, liver, colon and rectum and breast.

How does alcohol increase the risk of cancer?

Williams: It is not completely understood how alcohol raises cancer risk and it may vary based on the type of cancer. Alcohol can damage body tissues, slow the body's ability to break down and get rid of harmful chemicals, decrease absorption of important nutrients required to keep cells in the body healthy and raise estrogen levels in women (which could affect breast cancer risk). Also, alcohol consumption can add extra calories to the diet and lead to weight gain, which is concerning as being overweight or obese is known to increase the risk of many types of cancer. Along with these effects, alcohol may contribute to cancer growth in unknown ways.

What are your recommendations for patients with cancer/the general public regarding alcohol?

Williams: When you can, choose to drink non-alcoholic beverages as recommended by the American Cancer Society. If you choose to drink alcohol, limit your enjoyment to 2 drinks per day

for men and 1 drink a day for women. The recommended limit is lower for women due to body size and slower breakdown of alcohol as compared to men. Talk with your doctor to determine the effects of alcohol on your health specifically.

Mocktails

Just because the alcohol is missing doesn't mean you can't enjoy a fun and festive beverage. Try a virgin bloody mary, seltzer water with a splash of pomegranate juice or ginger beer with a squeeze of fresh lime. Feeling fancy? Try the recipes below for mocktails filled with cancer-fighting ingredients.

Ginger Pink Lemonade

From [AICR](#)

- 2 1/2 cups water
- 1 in. piece fresh ginger, peeled
- 2 Tbsp. agave nectar
- 3/4 cup sliced raspberries or strawberries (fresh or frozen)
- 3/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (6 medium lemons)

Directions: Place water, ginger, agave nectar, berries and lemon juice in the container of a blender. Process for a few seconds until smooth. Transfer to a pitcher and store in the refrigerator until ready to serve. Serve over ice. Add a splash of seltzer for some fizz, if you like!

Pomegranate Mock Mojito

From [Rebecca Katz](#)

- 1/2 cup freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1/2 cup pomegranate juice
- 2 teaspoons honey, optional
- 24 sprigs spearmint or peppermint
- 1 cup seltzer water
- Ice

Directions: Put the lime juice, pomegranate juice, and honey into a large measuring cup and stir to combine. Add the mint leaves and crush with a wooden spoon against the side of the cup. Add the

seltzer water and stir. Pour into two glasses filled with ice and serve immediately.

Variations: Use cranberry juice or blueberry juice in place of the pomegranate juice.

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<http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/new-guidelines-mean>