# A very inconvenient truth: alcohol isn't good for us

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### Alcohol is a carcinogen and there is no safe dose, but there are ways we can reduce the harm it does.

It's unfortunate but true - alcohol is a carcinogen and there is no safe dose. Alcohol use increases the risk of mouth, throat, liver, bowel and breast cancers, and is estimated to be responsible for one in 20 deaths around the world.

National data shows that younger Australians are now drinking less than previous youth cohorts, but middle-aged people are continuing to drink at much the same levels, despite substantial and increasing evidence of the many forms of harm caused by alcohol. Apparently drinking is a hard habit to kick, but how worried should we be?

Some people should be very worried. Recent analyses show that just 10 per cent of Australians are responsible for more than half (54 per cent) of all alcohol consumed.

This is staggering given Australians have high per capita levels of alcohol consumption by world standards, yet half of all that intake is consumed by a small proportion of very heavy users. These heavy drinkers are more likely to be men and to live in regional or remote parts of the country. The favoured tipples are full-strength beer and cask wine, especially those brands at the cheaper end of the price spectrum.

Effective methods of helping heavy drinkers reduce their consumption need to be found. In countries such as Scotland, a minimum price on alcohol has been imposed to ensure that alcohol is not too cheap. In Australia, it is possible to buy alcohol for as little as $0.33 per standard drink, which is cheaper than bottled water, making it all too easy to drink way too much. Reducing the extent of alcohol advertising is another good place to start. Studies show that the more children are exposed to alcohol advertising, the earlier they start drinking, the more they drink, and the more alcohol-related problems they experience later in life.

Preventing children from being exposed to alcohol ads on TV, billboards, bus stops, football jerseys, sporting ovals and websites would go a long way towards avoiding some becoming heavy drinkers later in life.

There are also things that drinkers can do to help themselves. There is evidence that half of drinkers regularly accept drinks they do not want to avoid peer pressure or offending their hosts. Manning up and refusing drinks others try to push on us can reduce total intake. Research also shows that actively counting one's drinks has a dampening effect on total consumption.

Finally, a national education campaign would help drinkers understand why they need to decrease their intake to reduce their risk of alcohol-related harm.

### Metadata

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