# Australian Alcohol Guidelines

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## What are Australia's Guidelines on alcohol?

The National Health and Medical Research Council has established Australian Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol.

There are three Guidelines:

##### ****Guideline 1: Reducing the risk of alcohol-related harm for adults****

To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy men and women should drink no more than 10 standard drinks a week and no more than 4 standard drinks on any one day. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol.

##### ****Guideline 2: Children and people under 18 years of age****

To reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol.

##### ****Guideline 3: Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding****

a) To prevent harm from alcohol to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol.

b) For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby.

These Guidelines are based on the best available, current medical evidence.

But it is important to know that following these guidelines does not remove your risk entirely.

Healthy adults who drink according to these Guidelines have less than a 1 in 100 chance of dying from a disease or injury caused by alcohol - but not zero risk.

A standard drink contains 10 grams of pure alcohol.

[Learn about standard drinks](https://fare.org.au/resources/reducing-your-risk/standard-drink-alcohol/)

## Alcohol Guidelines for other groups

[Children and young people](#anchora) [Pregnancies](#anchorb) [Breastfeeding](#anchorc)

## Alcohol guidelines for children and young people

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol. There is no safe level of alcohol consumption for anyone under the age of 18.

Here's what the evidence tells us:

Alcohol can affect the young developing brain

Children and young people under 18 are more sensitive to alcohol, which can affect their brain development. The human brain develops until around 25 years of age.

Alcohol fuels risky behaviours

Alcohol increases risk-taking behaviour and can lead to unsafe sex, car accidents, injuries and assaults.

Alcohol causes mental ill-health

Alcohol can make existing [****mental health concerns worse****](https://fare.org.au/resources/alcohol-health-impacts/alcohol-mental-health/) over time, and contribute to the development of mental health concerns.

Heightened risk of alcohol addiction

Research has shown that early alcohol use is more likely to lead to problems with alcohol later in life.

### Talking to children and young people about alcohol

It’s important to do what we can to keep children and young people healthy and safe. Find out some strategies for talking with children and young people about alcohol.

[Read more about alcohol and young people](https://fare.org.au/resources/supporting-someone-alcohol-use/children-young-people-alcohol/)

## Alcohol guidelines during pregnancy

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, you should not drink any alcohol. This is because any alcohol you drink passes directly to your developing baby and can damage their brain, body, and organs.

No safe level of alcohol consumption during pregnancy has been found, which is why the moment you start trying is the moment to stop drinking alcohol.

The Guideline for when pregnant or planning a pregnancy is based on this evidence:

Alcohol passes straight to the baby

At every stage of pregnancy, any alcohol consumed passes directly to the developing baby. This can increase the risk of miscarriage, stillbirth, and babies being born prematurely, small for gestational age, or with low birth weight.

Development starts early

In early pregnancy, alcohol can disrupt the development of cells that go on to form the placenta, reducing its effectiveness and increasing the risk of other placental problems.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)

Alcohol consumed at any stage of pregnancy passes directly to the developing baby’s brain, which can lead to FASD, a lifelong disability. People with FASD can experience challenges including physical and emotional developmental delay, impaired speech and language development, learning problems and difficulty controlling behaviour.

No safe time to drink alcohol

There is no identified safe time to drink alcohol throughout pregnancy. While all organs and systems can be affected, the baby’s brain is the organ most severely damaged by alcohol.

Other body parts develop at different points during pregnancy, and exposure to alcohol at these critical times can damage systems and organs such as sight, hearing, lung and heart functions.

### Supporting alcohol-free pregnancies

Most people don’t know the moment they become pregnant. So, if you’re planning a pregnancy, it is important to stop drinking alcohol as soon as you start trying.

[Find out more about having an alcohol-free pregnancy](https://fare.org.au/resources/alcohol-health-impacts/alcohol-and-pregnancy/)

## Alcohol guidelines for breastfeeding

The Australian Alcohol Guidelines advise that if you are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for your baby.

This Guideline for breastfeeding is based on the following evidence:

Alcohol enters breastmilk

If you drink alcohol, it enters your breastmilk from your blood. While there is alcohol in your blood, it is also in your breastmilk.

Alcohol can disrupt breastfeeding routines

Even small amounts of alcohol can disrupt your baby’s sleep and make feeding more difficult due to reductions in milk supply and the flow of milk.

Babies' brains are more vulnerable to alcohol

Infant brains, which continue to develop after birth, are more vulnerable to alcohol than adult brains.

Alcohol-related harms

Research has found alcohol in breastmilk has been linked to reduced verbal IQ, lower cognitive ability, and slowed growth.

### Alcohol-free breastfeeding is safest

When breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for the health of your baby. If you do drink alcohol, there are strategies you can use to ensure your baby does not drink breastmilk containing alcohol.

[Learn about reducing risks with alcohol when breastfeeding](https://fare.org.au/resources/alcohol-health-impacts/alcohol-and-breastfeeding/)

## Some people are at greater risk of alcohol harms

Some people are at greater risk of alcohol-caused disease or injury:

People aged 18-25

Drinking alcohol can impact brain development – and a human brain still develops until around 25 years of age. Young people are at increased risk of alcohol-related harms, both in the short and long term.

People aged 60+

People older than 60 years should take extra caution, as their bodies are less capable of processing alcohol. They are also more likely to have a chronic condition, which can [**negatively interact with alcohol.**](https://fare.org.au/resources/alcohol-health-impacts/alcohol-and-body/)

People with family history of alcohol disorder

People with a family history of an alcohol use disorder may have a higher risk of developing an alcohol use disorder themselves.

People on medication or illicit drugs

People who take certain kinds of medicine or use illicit drugs can be at risk of side effects by also consuming alcohol.

People with chronic health conditions

For people with health conditions, such as liver disease, hepatitis B and C, epilepsy, obesity or mental health conditions, alcohol can make their conditions worse.

Men

Men are more likely to be drink alcohol at high-risk levels. This means men are more vulnerable to short-term alcohol-related harms, including road accidents, falls and violence, and chronic harms.

Women

Women are more affected by alcohol than men due to metabolic differences. Women who drink at high-risk levels are at greater risk of alcohol-related diseases compared to men who drink at the same levels.

Would you like to know more about the Australian Alcohol Guidelines and the evidence behind them?

[Learn more about the Guidelines](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-advice/alcohol%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

More information

## Related information



## Need advice or support?

To find a local GP, you can call 1800 022 222 or visit [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au). To find a local psychologist, visit [psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist](http://psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist). If you need other support to reduce your drinking, you can contact the National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline on 1800 250 015.

## Join our community

Will you join the community taking action on alcohol?