camh
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Steps Towards Safer Drinking

A Workbook Designed to Reduce Alcohol Use

stop
STOP SMOKING TREATMENT for ONTARIO PATIENTS

01

Introduction

Welcome to the Alcohol Reduction Workbook. This resource was developed to help you make informed choices about drinking alcohol, better understand your drinking patterns, and feel more in control. Here, you will find practical tools and strategies that have been shown to help people reduce their alcohol use.

Why does this matter if you're trying to quit smoking? Cutting down on alcohol can make it easier to stay on track with your quit attempt. Alcohol lowers your inhibitions, which can make you more likely to smoke—even if you didn't plan to. For many people, drinking is also tied to routines or social situations where they used to smoke. Reducing alcohol use can help you avoid these triggers, reinforce your decision to quit, and improve your chances of success.

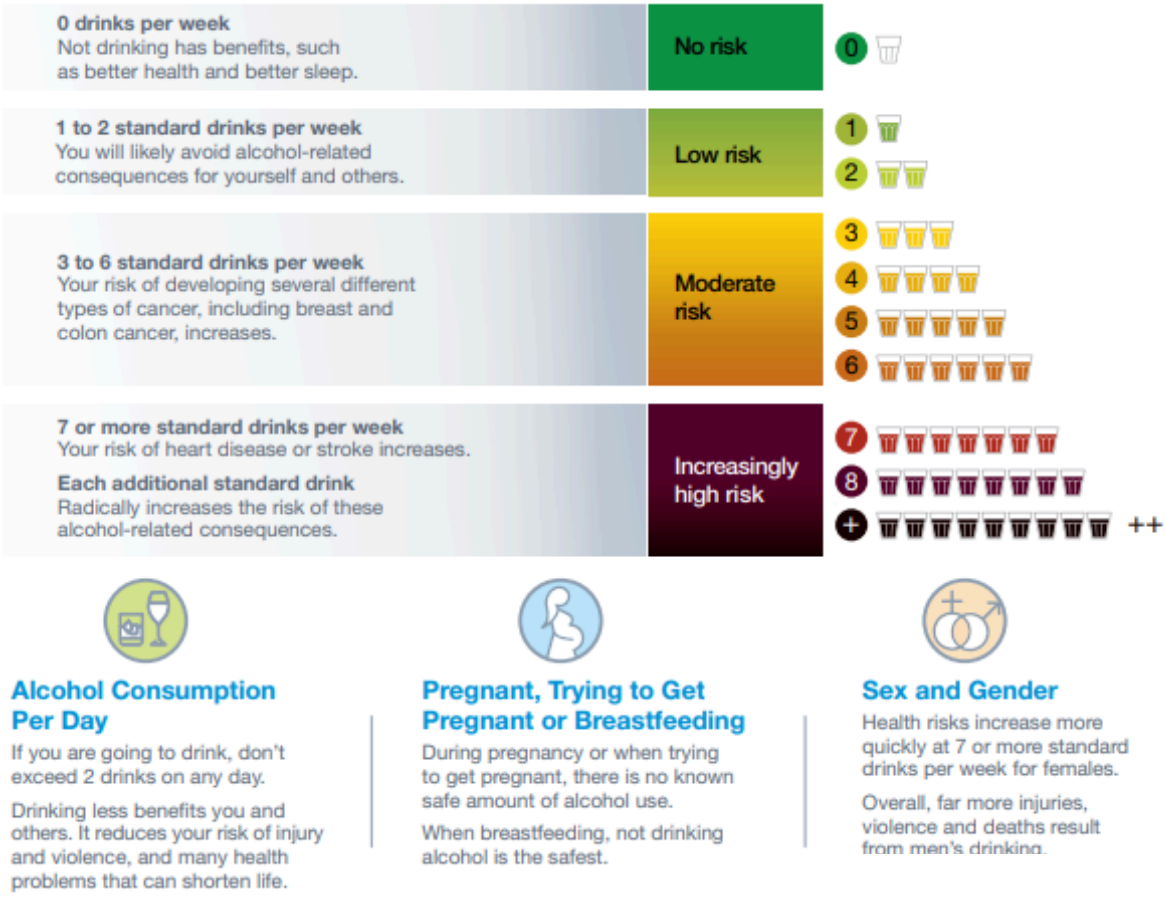
Health Benefits of drinking less There are also important health benefits. Both alcohol and tobacco increase the risk of several serious health conditions—including heart disease, liver disease, and some types of cancer. People who both drink and smoke face a particularly high risk of developing cancers of the mouth and throat. By reducing how much you drink—especially while quitting smoking—you can lower your overall cancer risk and support better long-term health. Although it was once thought that light drinking had some health benefits, newer research shows that not drinking at all may be the healthiest option. Drinking a lot of alcohol is much more harmful than drinking a little, though, so cutting back can also have important health benefits. It might also make it easier to quit smoking.

01

Understanding your Risk

To limit health risks, guidelines say that **women** should limit themselves to 2 drinks on any day or 10 drinks per week; and **men** to 3 drinks on any day or 15 per week. One drink is a bottle of beer, a glass of wine, or a shot of spirits (whiskey, rum, vodka, gin, tequila, etc.) Everyone should have some days when they don't drink at all. The guidelines are lower for women because women are more strongly affected by alcohol and might face extra health risks. Remember, these are **risk limiting** guidelines – it's better to drink even less than this.

The chart below, taken from Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (2023) shows how your risk from alcohol changes based on how much you drink in a week.



01

Why Quitting (or Cutting Back) on Both is Good for You

Better Long-Term Success

Studies show that people who quit smoking and drinking are more likely to stay smoke-free than those who quit smoking while still drinking.

More Energy, Better Mood

Within weeks, your lungs start clearing out, and your liver begins repairing itself, and you might notice better sleep, clearer skin, and improved mental health.

Lower Cancer & Heart Disease Risk

Reducing just one helps, but cutting both is best.

More Money in Your Pocket

The average person who smokes and drinks spends thousands on alcohol and cigarettes every year. Imagine what else you could do with that cash!

What's your biggest motivation for cutting back on drinking? (Circle one or add your own). Underline all those that are important to you.

- Feel healthier
- Save money
- Improve relationships
- Sleep better
- Have more energy
- Lower disease risk
- Other: _____

02

Pros & Cons

To start, it's best to think about the **pros and cons** of drinking less. These will be different for everyone, but cons might include not participating in some social events or being pressured to drink by friends, while pros would include being healthier, sleeping better, avoiding hangovers, and saving money. Looking at both sides can help you decide what you want to do. ***Please take a moment to consider pros and cons.***

Pros (Why Cutting Back Might Be Good for Me)

Examples: Better sleep, more energy, saving money, improved health, no hangovers

_____

_____

_____

Cons (What Might Be Hard About Drinking Less?)

Examples: Feeling social pressure, missing out on some events, changing habits

_____

_____

_____

Step 2: Weigh Your Options

Looking at both lists, how do you feel? Do the pros outweigh the cons? What stands out to you?

_____

_____

03

Goal Setting

If you decide to reduce your drinking, it helps to set specific goals. For example, you might:

- Decide not to have more than a certain number of drinks on any one day, or in any one week.
- Choose some days of the week to be alcohol-free.
- Set a date for quitting alcohol altogether.

Are there goals you want to set? What are they?

Which of these goals feel right for you? (Check any that apply or write your own)

- I will limit myself to no more than _____ drinks per day.
- I will limit myself to no more than _____ drinks per week.
- I will have alcohol-free days on (circle or write them below):
- Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday
- I will stop drinking alcohol by (date): _____

Important: if you drink a lot every day, you should not quit suddenly! In this case, it will be best to talk to your doctor about the best way to safely reduce your drinking.

04

Planning

Once you have goals, you need a **plan** for meeting them. This might be as simple as setting limits for yourself. If you're interested in some more in-depth planning, there are some good tools for doing that. www.Knowalcohol.ca is a web application that was designed by health professionals, to help people track and reduce their drinking. This web application is freely available and is managed by researchers at the University of Victoria. It can help you track your drinking, set goals, and see your progress. ***Are there plans you can make now? Are alcohol-management websites/apps of interest to you?***

What strategies will help you stick to your goal? (Check all that apply!)

- ☐ **Track my progress** – I'll use a website like www.Knowalcohol.ca or the tracking log provided.
- ☐ **Set limits** – I'll decide ahead of time how much I'll drink.
- ☐ **Find alternatives** – I'll swap my usual drink for (***tea, gum, a walk, water, non alcoholic drink etc.***)
- ☐ **Take it slow:** When I finish a drink, I will wait _____ (minutes/ hours) before having another.
- ☐ **Avoid triggers** – I'll stay away from places or situations that make me want to smoke/drink (bars, clubs, etc.)
- ☐ **Tell a friend** – I'll get support from (***friend, family, coach***).
- ☐ **Reward myself** – I'll treat myself when I hit my goal (***what's your reward?***)
- ☐ **Other:**_____

04

Planning

What might get in the way of your goal? (Circle one or add your own.)

- Stress or emotions
- Social pressure
- Cravings
- Habits/routines
- Other: _____

Your backup plan: If I feel like smoking/drinking, I will _____ instead.

04

Tracking Log

Day	# Drinks	# Cigarettes	Where was I?	Feelings?	Anything that Helped me Cut Back?
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					
Sunday					

Reflect & Adjust

Date of Completion: _____

Check in with yourself after a week- set an alarm in your calendar.

What strategies worked? _____

- What was tough? _____
- Any tweaks to make? _____

Remember: Progress, not perfection! Each small step brings you closer to your goal. You've got this!

05

Specific Reduction Techniques

There are also some more specific ways to make sure you meet your goals:

- Count your drinks so you're always aware of how much you've had and you can respect limits you've set.
- When you finish a drink, wait a while before having another.
- If at a bar, limit your cash to create a spending limit (and don't use your cards!)
- If you find you smoke and drink at the same time, limit the number of cigarettes you have on you.
- Set a time to stop drinking.
- If you drink when you go out, don't go out on days you've decided not to drink.

Are these techniques you will be able to use?

06

Conclusion

Making the decision to reduce or quit alcohol can have a significant impact on your life. Whether you choose to reduce or quit, remember that progress is personal, and you are not alone on this journey. We hope you can **use the resources and advice** provided in this portal and we encourage you to **connect with your healthcare provider for support**. Thank you!