

Low Risk Drinking Guidelines

“Alcohol in Moderation” is a concept that encourages responsible and informed choices regarding the consumption of alcohol.

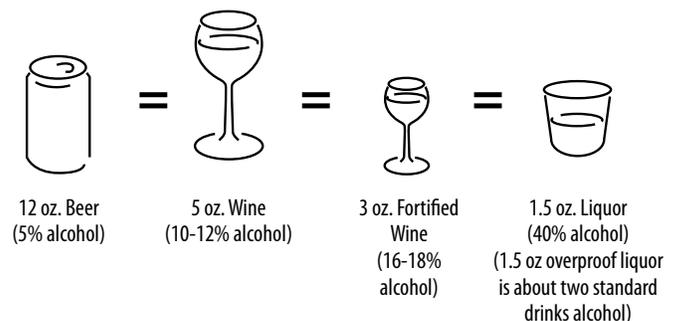
- Canada currently does not have national consensus on drinking guidelines.
- A Drinking Guidelines Expert Advisory Panel, chaired by a representative of the College of Family Physicians of Canada is currently leading the development of national drinking guidelines. This is a result of a recommendation identified in *Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm in Canada: Toward a Culture of Moderation*, whereby the need to “develop and promote national alcohol drinking guidelines to encourage a culture of moderation, and aim for consistency and clarity of alcohol-related health and safety messages” was highlighted.
- One set of guidelines currently recognized and used by many provincial governments and community based organizations in Canada was originally developed during a health-related international conference held in 1994. In 1997, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) revised the guidelines.
- Low risk drinking guidelines indicate that daily alcohol intake should not exceed more than 2 ‘standard drinks’ for males and 1 ‘standard drink’ for females; weekly alcohol intake should not exceed 14 ‘standard drinks’ for males and 9 ‘standard drinks’ for females.

	Maximum daily consumption	Maximum weekly consumption
Females	1	9
Males	2	14

- Low risk drinking guidelines for alcohol use represent ‘lower risk’ rather than ‘no risk’. The only way to eliminate all risk associated with alcohol use is to abstain from consuming alcohol.

Definition of a ‘Standard Drink’

- Individuals may consume several ounces of alcohol within a single beverage, mistakenly considering this to be ‘one drink’. Understanding the definition of a ‘standard drink’ assists individuals in better knowing how much alcohol content is found in a beverage and provides parameters to self-monitor how much alcohol is being consumed.
- A standard drink is considered to have a total of 13.6 grams of alcohol. Size of container and alcohol content are taken into consideration when determining a standard drink.
- The chart found below highlights the alcohol content found in each type of alcoholic beverage. All beverages shown below have the equivalent amounts of alcohol.



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- Alcohol content, not type of drink, influences level of impairment. A 12 oz. cooler containing 6.9% alcohol content has approximately 1.5 times as much alcohol as a 12 oz. beer or cooler with 5% alcohol content.
- In Canada, beer is the highest consumed alcoholic beverage, followed by hard liquor (e.g. vodka, rum, etc.), then wine.

Definition of 'Binge Drinking'

- Binge drinking refers to consuming 5 or more standard drinks on one occasion for males, and 4 or more standard drinks on one occasion for females.

	Females	Males
Binge (heavy) drinking amounts	4+ drinks per sitting*	5+ drinks per sitting*

* 'Drinks' refer to 'standard drinks'

Prevalence

- Binge drinking has wide reaching impacts on health, well-being and safety.
- Binge drinking is a larger public health and social issue than alcohol dependence, as it affects a higher percentage of drinkers. According to the Canadian Addiction Survey (2004), the rate of alcohol dependence in Saskatchewan in 2002 was just over 4% while approximately 23% of those who drank in the past year drank in excess.
- Drinking in excess of low drinking guidelines is more common among Canadians 18-24 year of age than older populations. Low risk drinking guidelines are also exceeded more frequently within higher socio-economic populations, and in rural areas.
- In Canada, approximately 24% of males and 10% of females reported heavy drinking in 2008. Heavy drinking is defined by Statistics Canada as consuming 5 or more drinks per occasion at least 12 times per year.
- Males, age 18-19 years report the highest drinking rates, followed by males, age 20-34.
- Binge drinking has a high prevalence on post-secondary campuses, with approximately 1/3 of students reporting this type of drinking weekly. On average, students report consuming 6.4 drinks 1.3 times per week. Over 40% of students report consuming more than 5 drinks per occasion at least two times in the previous month while over 17% consumed 8 or more drinks per occasion at least two times in the previous month.
 - » Students living in post-secondary residences reportedly had the highest rates of drinking in excess, followed by students living away from the campus setting. Excessive drinking is defined as consuming 5 or more drinks on a single occasion two or more times per month. On-campus and off-campus students were 2.1 and 1.5 times more likely to show patterns of episodic excessive drinking in comparison with post-secondary students residing at home with their families.
 - » Most drinking occurs on weekends, off campus. Post-secondary students tend to consume more alcohol when in large gatherings (6.2 drinks vs. 1.8 drinks).
 - » On average, post-secondary students consume most alcohol while attending parties (6 drinks), while in residences (5.7 drinks) and in bars (5.1 drinks). Promotional events such as 'happy hours' and drink promotions are also associated with heavy drinking.
- Binge Drinking and drinking to intoxication can place a person at increased risk of harm. Alcohol reduces ones ability to anticipate dangerous situations, remove oneself from a dangerous situation, and to remember events.
- Binge drinking commands our attention. Saskatchewan's binge drinking rates are among the highest in Canada, second only to British Columbia.

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Saskatchewan's binge drinking rates are approximately 9.4% higher than the national average.

- Nationally, adults age 25+ tend to drink more moderately than youth and young adults (age 15-24 years). A pattern of heavy, periodic drinking was reportedly 5 times higher for this younger age group than for other adults. In Saskatchewan, nearly 30% of surveyed young people (age 18-29 years) drank heavily (defined by the Canadian Medical Association as consuming 5 or more drinks monthly, or more often).
- Binge drinking is a common occurrence for many youth. A recent study found that, of Grade 7-12 students who have consumed alcohol, the mean age at which they first binge drank was 14.1 years. In fact, nearly 75% of Saskatchewan youth in Grades 7-12 have used alcohol and over 66% have engaged in binge drinking according to the 2006-2007 Youth Smoking Survey. Nationally, binge drinking rates among youth are high. Over 1/3 of Grade 7-9 students have engaged in binge drinking and over 40% of youth age 15-19 years have done so.

Strategies for Addressing Binge Drinking

- Efforts to reduce the incidence of binge drinking and the associated harms are being introduced into communities across Saskatchewan. Strategies include:
 - » Developing policies outlining how alcohol is to be handled in the community.
 - » Providing training and awareness for individuals and businesses involved with the service of alcohol.
 - » Promoting responsible hosting tips to parents, individuals and businesses.
 - » Discouraging 'happy hour' and other drink promotions.
 - » Utilizing various mediums to raise awareness of the harms associated with binge drinking (media campaigns, presentations).

Sources:

- About Alcohol, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at www.camh.net.
- Alcohol... What's the Harm? Facilitator Manual, Saskatchewan Ministry of Health at www.health.gov.sk.ca/addictions-presentations.
- Canadian Addiction Survey (CAS): A National Survey of Canadians' Use of Alcohol and Other Drugs: Highlights Report, Prevalence of Use and Related Harms, 2004 at Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse at www.ccsa.ca.
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- Canadian Campus Survey 2004 by Adlaf, E., Demers & Gliksman, L., 2005, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at www.camh.net.
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health at www.camh.net.
- Centre for Addictions Research of British Columbia, Stockwell, T., 2005 at www.carbc.ca.
- Health Concerns, Canadian Alcohol and Drug Use Monitoring Survey, Health Canada at www.hc-sc.gc.ca.
- Health Indicators, Statistics Canada at www.statcan.gc.ca.
- Myths and Facts About Drug-Facilitated Sexual Assault at www.sexualityandu.ca.

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- Overview Effects of Alcohol, 2006 by Rehm, J., Giesbrecht, N., Patra, E. & Mann, R., Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2006 at www.camh.net.
- Reducing Alcohol-Related Harm in Canada: Toward a Culture of Moderation, The National Alcohol Strategy Working Group, April 2007.
- Substance Abuse in Canada: Youth in Focus, September 2007, Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse at www.ccsa.ca.
- 2006-07 Youth Smoking Survey, Health Canada at www.hc-sc.gc.ca.