

# CANADA ISSUES NEW ALCOHOL BEVERAGE CONSUMPTION GUIDELINES



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## Lifetime Risk of Alcohol-Attributable Death and Disability

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By

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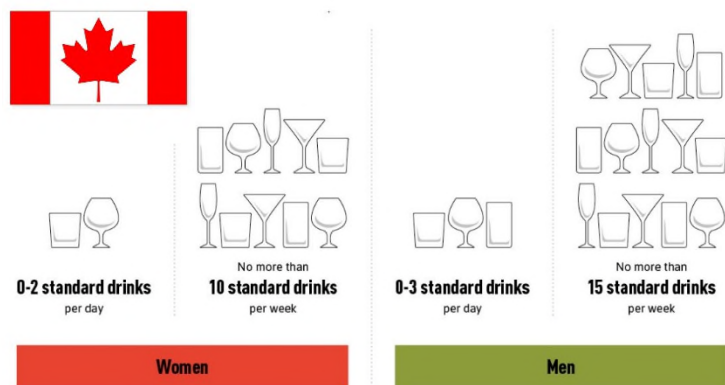
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New guidelines published by the **Canadian Centre of Substance Use and Addiction (CCSA)** recommend that citizens consume no more than two drinks per week, with the report asserting that “any amount of alcohol is not good for your health.” The new guidelines, contained in a January, 2023 report entitled “*Lifetime Risk of Alcohol – Attributable Death and Disability*,” suggest Canadians who consume seven or more alcohol beverages per week are considered “high-risk” for serious health issues, including cancer, heart disease and stroke.

The full text of the report is accessible online at: <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2023-01/LRDG%20Lifetime%20risk%20of%20alcohol%20attributable%20death%20and%20disability.pdf>

According to the CCSA’s report, which was funded in part by **Health Canada**, one to two drinks per week is considered low-risk, while three to six drinks is labeled moderate-risk. CCSA asserts that any more than two ‘standard’ drinks per week represents an increased risk in negative outcomes, including various cancers.

Canada defines a ‘standard’ drink as a bottle of beer, glass of wine, a single shot of spirits or a bottle of cider.



This new CCSA report was issued after two years of research, a review of nearly 6,000 studies and a survey of around 1,000

members of the public. It is an update on a 2011 report titled “*Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines.*”

CCSA summarizes the five specific findings of its analysis as follows:

1. Consuming alcohol can lead to death and disability from many diseases and injuries. However, alcohol’s effects on health differ by disease, leading to confusion on what constitutes low-risk drinking. Accordingly, estimates of the effects of alcohol use on all causes of mortality and disability at the individual level are needed to best advise individuals about their long-term risk.
2. Since the publication in 2011 of Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines, numerous diseases have been found to be causally related to alcohol use. Additional research has been published on how alcohol affects the risk of disease and injury. Based on this new information, this study updates the lifetime risk estimates for death and disability for people in Canada who consume alcohol.
3. The lifetime risk of death and disability increases as alcohol consumption increases. As men and women experienced a similar risk of death and disability caused by alcohol for all levels of alcohol use examined, one guideline can be used for men and women.
4. Based on risk thresholds of 17.5 years of life lost attributable to alcohol per 1,000 lifetimes, the alcohol use risk threshold should be set at 4 g/day for men and women in Canada. However, based on the same number of years of life lost but per 100 lifetimes, the threshold should be set at 11 g/day.
5. The previous low-risk alcohol drinking guidelines recommended that men drink no more than 15 standard drinks per week (about 29 g/day) and women drink no more than 10 standard drinks per week (about 19 g/day). Based on the new estimations, these levels of alcohol use are not consistent with the evidence and acceptable risk thresholds (1 in 100 or 1 in 1,000 lifetime deaths attributable to alcohol). People who used these guidelines as a marker of risk may have experienced substantially more harm than originally thought.

Canada’s new alcohol guidance places it on the more conservative end of the spectrum compared with other countries. Guidance published by Australia in 2020 recommended a maximum of 10 drinks per week, with France’s guidelines also hew to that total. The UK recommends no more than roughly six ‘standard’ drinks per weeks.

In the United States, the current *2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends that adults of legal drinking age can choose not to drink, or to drink in moderation by limiting intake to two (2) drinks or less in a day for men or one (1) drink or less in a day for women, on days when alcohol is consumed. Details on the U.S. Dietary Guidelines are accessible online at: <https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/resources/2020-2025-dietary-guidelines-online-materials>

Industry members often caution that government-issued consumption guidelines can be influenced by political considerations as well as science. For example, the wine industry has published

numerous studies suggesting that red wine provides healthful benefits. According to these studies, antioxidants in red wine called polyphenols may help protect the lining of blood vessels in the heart. A polyphenol called **resveratrol** is one substance in red wine that's received attention for its health benefits. Other segments of the industry suggest that alcohol beverages, when consumed in moderation, can alleviate stress or discomfort, although such studies are quick to caution that individual physiology can produce differing results.

It is also important to note that since the repeal of Prohibition, it has been illegal for any alcohol beverage industry member to advertise alcohol beverages as being “healthy.” The TTB prohibits the use of, “any health-related statement that is untrue in any particular or tends to create a misleading impression as to the effects on health of alcohol consumption” on any label or advertisement for an alcohol beverage. See 27 CFR §§ 4.64(i); 5.65; 7.54. Under federal alcohol advertising regulations:

A specific health claim will not be considered misleading if it is truthful and adequately substantiated by scientific or medical evidence; sufficiently detailed and qualified with respect to the categories of individuals to whom the claim applies; adequately discloses the health risks associated with both moderate and heavier levels of alcohol consumption; and outlines the categories of individuals for whom any levels of alcohol consumption may cause health risks.” *Id.*

The required information must appear as part of the specific health claim, and in a manner as prominent as the specific health claim itself, *i.e.*, the required information cannot be relegated to the “fine print” often seen in advertisements of other regulated products and services.

Government recommended guidelines should always be taken seriously, by both the industry and consumers alike. For more information regarding alcohol consumption standards, health claims, and product advertising, contact GrayRobinson’s [Nationwide Alcohol Industry Group](#) by telephone at (866) 382-5132 or via email at [beveragelaw@gray-robinson.com](mailto:beveragelaw@gray-robinson.com)



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Richard M. Blau leads the GrayRobinson Nationwide Alcohol Industry Group, focusing on the laws that govern the production, importation, marketing, distribution, and sale of alcoholic beverages throughout North America. Richard works with all levels of the alcohol industry’s “three-tier system,” as well as providers who are not licensees.. Richard has achieved numerous peer-related accolades for his legal work, including *Chambers and Partners* - Nationally ranked as "Band 1" for Alcohol Beverage Law and Food Law; *The Best Lawyers in America*® - Nationally listed for Food and Beverage Law.

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