



Alcohol and Cancer Risk

A new report linking alcohol to an increased risk for several cancers was published in January of 2025. The U.S. Surgeon General's Office released *Alcohol and Cancer Risk*, detailing alcohol's role as one of the top behavioral risks for cancer. This new report describes scientific evidence for the causal link between drinking alcohol and an increased risk for at least seven different types of cancer.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, key data from the report reveals that consuming alcoholic beverages increases the risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, breast, liver, colon, and rectum.

In 2020, 741,300 cancer cases worldwide were attributable to alcohol consumption.

How Alcohol Causes Cancer

Alcohol breaks down in the body into acetaldehyde which damages DNA in multiple ways causing an increased risk of cancer. It also alters the level of multiple hormones including estrogen, which can increase breast cancer risk.

Alcohol induces oxidative stress, increasing the risk of cancer by damaging DNA, proteins, and cells causing increased inflammation. In addition to feeding cancer cells, inflammation in the body contributes to multiple health problems.

Alcohol also leads to greater absorption of cancer-causing carcinogens. Carcinogens dissolve in alcohol which then alters cells in the mouth and throat making the carcinogens more easily absorbed by the body. Tobacco products contain carcinogens therefore, people who use both tobacco and alcohol have a much higher risk of developing cancer. The combined effect can be up to thirty-five times greater than the sum of the individual risks.

Women More at Risk

The risk of developing cancer from drinking is higher for women than men. For women who drink just two alcoholic drinks per day, the risk of cancer increases by 21.8% overall. For men the increase is 13.1%.

Four more women out of 100 would develop breast cancer due to having just two alcoholic drinks per day, and the risk increases with the amount of alcohol consumed. Women are more at risk because alcohol causes a rise in estrogen-receptor positive cancer—the most common form of breast cancer. In data collected from 118 studies, moderate drinkers (two drinks per day) were found to increase their breast cancer risk by 22%, and heavy drinkers (more than two drinks per day) by 60%.

Less than 45% of Americans are aware that alcohol consumption increases cancer risk. Ninety-one percent know that radiation causes cancer, 89% know that tobacco causes cancer, and 53% know that obesity causes cancer, but the alcohol industry has done a good job of keeping alcohol and cancer risk awareness low.

With only slightly more than 50% of Americans knowing that obesity causes cancer, and less than 50% knowing about alcohol's cancer risk, too few people are aware of the danger of carrying excess body weight (especially around the middle) and drinking alcohol.

Spread the Word

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has free downloadable resources, including workplace posters, to help share information about the link between alcohol and cancer. These sharable resources are available at: <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/alcohol-cancer/index.html>

The following suicide prevention information, while provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, will also be helpful to those in states other than Georgia. All online resources listed are available to users nationwide.

Self-Injury Awareness Day, also known as Self-Harm Awareness Day, is an international event occurring annually on March 1st. Its purpose is to raise awareness and increase understanding of self-injury.

Self-injury, often referred to in clinical mental health contexts as nonsuicidal self-injury (NSSI), encompasses various behaviors that are not intended to result in death by suicide. However, individuals who engage in self-injury are at a higher risk for suicide, particularly among youth.

The reasons for self-harm are diverse and complex, making it essential not to generalize or jump to conclusions upon observing signs of self-injury. Both self-injury and suicide are highly stigmatized topics, often surrounded by misinformation. It is crucial to approach these issues with sensitivity and understanding.

Let's take a moment to address some common misconceptions about self-injurious behaviors, focusing on a key point relevant to this article: self-harm is not the same as a suicide attempt. As noted earlier, the clinical term for this behavior explicitly refers to "non-suicidal" self-injuries. Individuals with personal experience in this area, who have also grappled with suicidal thoughts, often report that they engage in self-harm as a coping mechanism to prevent themselves from attempting suicide. Many observers may mistakenly conclude that someone who self-harms is suicidal; while there is a connection between the two, this is frequently not the case. So, why do people engage in self-harm? This question leads us to the next significant myth surrounding self-harm.

People who self-harm are often thought to be seeking attention. This is one of the most harmful myths surrounding self-injury, as it adds to the stigma and influences how we respond to those who exhibit these behaviors, particularly young individuals. While some myths may lead to overreactions, this particular belief can cause us to downplay the severity of self-harm and overlook the underlying reasons behind it.

Self-harm is a complex behavior, and the motivations for it are diverse. Contrary to the attention-seeking narrative, individuals often engage in self-harm as a coping mechanism to manage intense emotions or to alleviate feelings of emotional numbness. For some, self-injury provides an alternative way to express emotions when they lack other outlets. Additionally, after the injury, it may create an opportunity for self-care. It's crucial to understand and address the real reasons behind self-harm rather than dismissing it as a mere cry for help.

Believing that self-harm is merely attention-seeking behavior is linked to another common misconception: that individuals who self-harm should be left alone or ignored. Many people make the mistake of assuming that such behavior is just a phase that will eventually pass. However, the reality is that people who engage in self-harm are often struggling to find healthier ways to cope with emotional distress. This behavior indicates that the individual is experiencing significant emotional pain and could benefit from support and compassion. While these behaviors may diminish over time, they can also intensify. Similar to substance use, self-harm serves as a coping mechanism that

can lead to further harm, typically employed by those who have not discovered a healthier method for managing difficult emotions. Additionally, these individuals may grapple with underlying mental health conditions that require attention, which ties into the final set of myths about self-harm that we will discuss in this article.

People who self-harm are often labeled as "crazy," are thought to have borderline personality disorder (BPD), or are presumed to have experienced sexual abuse. While self-harming behavior can be associated with mental health conditions like bipolar disorder or a history of abuse, it's important to recognize that making generalizations about individuals who self-harm is unhelpful. The reasons behind self-harm vary significantly and may not be directly linked to a diagnosable mental health disorder or a history of sexual abuse.

Creating broad stereotypes about why people engage in self-harm contributes to stigma and perpetuates misinformation, similar to harmful stereotypes found in other areas. For example, certain headlines regarding high-profile suicides have suggested simplistic causes, such as "breakup leads to suicide," which can create myths.

Suicide is also a complex issue. The reasons behind a person's decision to attempt or complete suicide usually involve a combination of multiple stressors and risk factors, many of which overlap with those that lead to self-injury.

The shared risk factors are the main link between suicide and self-injury. As mentioned earlier, self-injury can serve as a coping mechanism for difficult emotions and may even prevent an individual from attempting suicide. However, self-injury can also indicate that a person is dealing with issues that elevate their risk of suicide. This highlights the importance of not ignoring self-injury, as addressing the underlying causes can also help mitigate the factors that contribute to suicidal thoughts or behaviors. While it is important not to panic or overreact upon noticing signs of self-injury, we encourage you to support the individual in seeking help and to approach them with compassion.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at:
<https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact the Suicide Prevention Director, Rachael Holloman, at:
rachael.holloman@dbhdd.ga.gov.



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Supervisor Newsletter

Value of a Drug-Free Workplace Program

Supervisors are responsible for maintaining a workplace where employees can do their jobs with the absolute minimal amount of risk every day. Therefore, it is important for supervisors to understand the value of the company's drug-free workplace program in providing a safe, drug-free work environment.

Supervisors must always ensure safe and healthy working conditions for all employees and enforcing the company substance abuse policy is a vital component to protect workers from danger arising from accidents due to alcohol and drug misuse at work.

Drug-free workplace programs help employers to improve the health of employees, maintain the safety of the workplace, reduce workers' comp claims, and avoid liability. When implemented and enforced effectively, the privacy concerns of employees, the accuracy of drug testing, and the company's return on investment can be fully realized.

When managed correctly, drug-free workplace programs are overwhelmingly supported by

employees. Workers in drug-free environments know that their workplace is safer and that coworkers can be depended on to be alert and focused at all times. Employees in a drug-free workplace are also reassured that their workplace is productive and that they won't miss a deadline because of having to cover for a colleague whose output is suffering due to substance abuse. Morale is higher in a drug-free workplace because employees prefer to be part of a team that gets the job done and provides great products and customer service.

Many employees report a sense of well-being from working in a drug-free environment, especially those in recovery. A drug and alcohol-free workplace often plays an essential role in continued sobriety and success.

Employer Benefits

When the company substance abuse policy is adequately enforced by supervisors, employers are able to take advantage of the financial rewards of a drug-free workplace program. Companies that can rely on the proper enforcement of their policies can more easily defend unemployment claims and raise appropriate defenses to workers' comp claims. In some states, employers also

receive a state-mandated discount on their workers' compensation insurance premiums when they meet the requirements of drug free certification. This is a substantial bottom-line savings for companies.

If an employee is fired due to a positive drug test and files an unemployment claim (which can cost the company money), the claim can potentially be denied if supervisors have followed state-specific rules and met all the regulations of the company drug-free workplace program. If an employee is fired for refusing to take a drug test, or for testing positive, the employer can argue that the dismissal was for misconduct (not adhering to company policy). If the employee quits rather than submit to the test, the employer can argue that the resignation was without good cause.

Workers' comp claims may also be denied if an employee tests positive for drugs or alcohol after an accident. Many states have a rebuttable presumption of intoxication defense, in which if the company has a comprehensive drug-free workplace policy, and an employee tests positive after an accident, it's possible the workers' compensation claim can be denied. If a supervisor can prove the employee was intoxicated or drug impaired at the time of the accident, then the employer has cause to deny the claim for workers' comp.

For small businesses, having a comprehensive drug free workplace program enforced by supervisors is even more important. Small companies are often the "employer of choice" for drug users because they know they are less likely to be identified as a drug user if there is no drug testing program in place. People who can't adhere to a substance abuse policy seek employment at companies that don't have one. Having a drug-free workplace program is a deterrent to drug use for workers and future employees.

In short, a well-supervised drug-free workplace program helps companies to avoid legal liability, ensures that workers are drug-free, lowers absenteeism and turnover rates, reduces employee theft and workplace violence, cuts down on workplace accidents, and reduces workers' compensation claims and costs. But a drug-free workplace program is only as effective as supervisors choose to make it. That is why it is important for supervisors to be educated on the benefits of the program.

There is a considerable return on investment for companies where supervisors fully understand the importance of maintaining a drug-free workplace and have a desire to keep their workplace and employees safe.



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