

## ***alcohol carcinogenic to humans -*** **LINK TO CANCER**



The Medical Journal of Australia recently published an analysis from the Cancer Council of Australia which shows that the level of cancer incidence caused by alcohol is higher than previously believed, with one in five breast cancers being linked to alcohol. The Cancer Council concludes that “**alcohol is clearly one of the most carcinogenic products in common use**”. A similar study from the British Medical Journal recommends abstinence from alcohol to reduce the risk of cancer. .

The new analysis shows the level of cancer incidence in Australia is higher than previously thought with more than 5,000 new cases each year linked to long-term drinking. An estimated 22% of Australia’s breast cancer cases were linked to alcohol consumption. This means that one in five cases could be linked to alcohol in Australia. New evidence also links alcohol to bowel cancer in men.

The Cancer Council of Australia recommends that, to reduce their risk of cancer, “*people should limit their consumption of alcohol or better still avoid alcohol altogether.*”

Professor Ian Olver CEO of the Cancer Council of Australia and co-author of the analysis, urges raising the awareness of the links between alcohol and cancer in the community so that people can make informed choices to minimise their cancer risk.

“There are long established links of alcohol to cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus and liver making alcohol **one of the most carcinogenic products in common use**. There is a dose-response relationship which meant that the risk of alcohol-related cancer increased with every drink consumed. “The more alcohol you consume over time, the higher your risk of developing an alcohol-related cancer.” Professor Olver said.

A study by the World Health Organization (WHO) in France, Italy, Spain, UK, the Netherlands, Greece, Germany and Denmark recruited 363,988 men and women aged mostly between 35 and 70 and followed them since the mid 1990’s. The participants completed a detailed questionnaire on diet and lifestyle. Alcohol consumption was measured on specific questions on the amount, frequency and type consumed. The conclusions drawn by WHO declare that there is a causal link between alcohol consumption and cancers of the liver, female breast, colorectum and upper digestive tract. The authors claim that a substantial proportion of alcohol-attributable cancers occurred in cases where alcohol was consumed above the recommended upper limit of the guidelines.

However, the study also calculated that alcohol consumption by men, was responsible for about 57,600 cases of cancer of the upper digestive tract, colorectum who live in Denmark, Greece, Germany, Italy, Spain and UK. While alcohol consumption by women in eight countries caused 21,500 cases of upper digestive tract, liver, colorectum and breast cancer of which 80% was due to consumption of more than one drink of beer, wine or spirits per day.

While some critics of the researchers would like to down play the effects of alcohol saying that abstaining from alcohol is not justified on current scientific data, but they did conclude with “*alcohol consumption should not be recommended to prevent cardiovascular disease of all-cause mortality*”

There is World-wide concern over the harm caused by alcohol and more than two million people around the world die each year from alcohol related causes. *The WHO Charter of Alcohol states that “all children and adolescents have the right to grow up in an environment protected from the negative consequences of alcohol consumption and, to the extent possible, from the promotion of alcoholic beverages”*

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References – Medical Journal of Australia, (July 2011)

The Globe (published by the Institute of Alcohol Studies for Global Alcohol Policy Alliance)