

Sensible Drinking

Drinking too much alcohol can lead to alcoholic liver disease and eventually to cirrhosis. You are less likely to develop these problems if you drink within the recommended safe limits. For any type of liver disease caused by alcohol, the main treatment is to stop drinking completely.

About alcohol

Drinking within safe limits is not likely to do you any harm and it's even been suggested that for certain people, moderate drinking - that is about one or two units of alcohol a day - may be good for your heart. However, the truth is that there are more effective ways to protect your heart, including eating a healthy balanced diet and regular exercise.

If you regularly drink too much alcohol, not only is it a risk to your health, but depending on how much and how often you drink, your work and relationships may also be affected. To stay safe and healthy, it pays to know your limits and drink alcohol sensibly.

Preventing alcoholic liver disease

You should stay within the recommended safe limits of alcohol consumption to avoid liver problems caused by alcohol. Those recommendations are :

- **Men** should drink no more four *drinks in any one day and less than 14 per week.
- **Women** should drink no more than three *drinks per day and no more than 7 drinks in a week.
- **Pregnant women.** The exact amount that is safe is not known. Therefore, pregnant women and women trying to become pregnant should not drink at all.

** One drink is a 12-ounce beer, a 5-ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of hard liquor. It is important to remember that many wines and beers are stronger than the more traditional strengths.*

In general, the more you drink above the safe limits, the more harmful alcohol is likely to be. And remember, binge drinking can be harmful even though the weekly total may not seem too high.

Drinking sensibly

Drinking sensibly doesn't mean missing out on all the fun. Remembering a few simple tips can help you cut down.

- Have something to eat before you drink, and if possible, while you're drinking.
- Start with low-alcohol or alcohol-free drinks, or alternate these with alcoholic drinks.
- Pace yourself - enjoy your drink slowly.
- Keep track of how much you're drinking.
- Don't drink alcohol every day of the week.

Ellen Hagopian, MD, FACS
Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery
ellenhagopianmd.com

When not to drink

It takes about one hour for your liver to break down one unit of alcohol. The more you drink, the longer it will take for the effects of alcohol to clear. There are times when not drinking alcohol at all is the safest choice. These include the following.

- Before you plan to drive or when you're driving.
- Before or when you're operating machinery or electrical equipment.
- Before or during swimming or other active sports.
- When you're taking certain medicines - always ask your doctor for advice.
- When you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can increase the risk of miscarriage and affect the development of your unborn baby.

You should not drink alcohol at all if:

- You have already developed early cirrhosis.
- You have chronic hepatitis or certain other liver problems. Your doctor will advise for each specific condition.
- You have a history of pancreatitis.

Do you need help to stop drinking?

Help and treatment is available if you find that you cannot stop drinking. If you feel that you, or a relative or friend, needs help stopping alcohol, then see your doctor.

Patient and family/friend resources :

- **New Jersey Addiction Services Hotline** : Offers help to callers worried about their own drinking and support to the family and friends of people who are drinking. Advice to callers on where to go for help : [In NJ dial 211](tel:2012612261)
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** : Offers support to those who want to stop drinking. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking : www.aa.org/
- **NJ Division of Addiction Services** : For information and resources about alcohol and substance abuse in New Jersey : www.state.nj.us/humanservices/das/home/index.html
- **Al-Alon** : Support for families and friends of alcoholics whether the drinker is still drinking or not : www.al-anon.alateen.org/

Sources : www.patient.co.uk
 www.bupa.co.uk/individuals/health-information

Disclaimer: This article is for information only and should not be used for the diagnosis or treatment of medical conditions. Consult a doctor or other health care professional for diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions.

Ellen Hagopian, MD, FACS
Hepato-Pancreato-Biliary Surgery
ellenhagopianmd.com