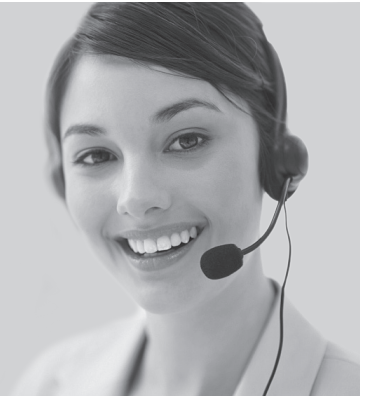


“It was great to talk with you.

Thank you for your interest in ‘Alcohol and Your Blood Pressure.’  
I hope you find this tip sheet helpful.

Please call me if you have more questions about this or other topics.

As your UPMC Health Plan health coach, I’m ready to help in any way I can.”



Most of us know that eating less salt and sodium can help lower blood pressure. But did you know that drinking less alcohol helps lower blood pressure too?

Here are some good reasons to cut back on alcohol for the sake of your blood pressure:

- The more alcohol you drink, the more likely you are to have high blood pressure.
- Alcohol can get in the way of some blood pressure medicines.
- Alcohol is high in calories. It has almost twice as many calories as the same amount of starch or sugar. It has almost as many calories as the same amount of fat.
- Alcohol can be part of weight gain. It is high in calories, increases appetite, and lowers willpower. Being overweight raises the risk for high blood pressure. It also makes it harder to control.

### How much should you limit alcohol?

The following guidance is for individuals who take no medicines and chose to drink. Keep in mind that both drinking less alcohol and drinking less often are better choices for your health.

- **For men up to age 65:** No more than 14 drinks per week and no more than 4 drinks on any one day. The average is often expressed as **no more than two drinks per day**.
- **For women up to age 65:** No more than 7 drinks per week and no more than 3 drinks on any one day. The average is often expressed as **no more than one drink per day**. Most women feel the effects of alcohol more quickly than men. They tend to weigh less than men. Women also have less of an enzyme that the body uses to process alcohol.



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- **For both men and women older than 65:** No more than 7 drinks per week and no more than 3 drinks on any one day. The average is often expressed as **no more than one drink per day**.

Both men and women feel the effects of alcohol more quickly as they age. For example, older adults are more likely to fall, wreck a vehicle, or injure themselves in other ways after drinking alcohol. They also are more likely to have health problems like the following that alcohol can make worse:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Heart failure
- Liver problems
- Osteoporosis
- Memory or mood problems

Note: A drink is defined by these amounts:

- 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits
- 5 ounces of wine
- 12 ounces of beer

If you take any medicines or herbal supplements, talk with your doctor before drinking. Many medications interact badly with alcohol. Though some of the following may seem mild by themselves, your doctor might recommend not taking them with alcohol:

- Aspirin, acetaminophen, and other pain medicines
- Blood pressure medicines
- Cold and allergy medicines
- Cough syrup
- Sleeping pills
- Anxiety or depression medicines

### Is alcohol good for your heart?

The moderate use of alcohol may have some benefits. But there are more questions than answers. Until we know more, the American Heart Association says, if you do not drink, do not start.

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There are many other proven ways to keep your heart healthy. Some are to watch your weight, eat healthy, and be active.

On the other hand, we do know that alcohol can be harmful.

- You may become addicted to it.
- Too much alcohol increases your risk of high blood pressure.
- It can damage your liver and pancreas.
- It contributes to high triglycerides (a kind of fat in the blood that is linked to heart disease).
- It plays a role in overweight and obesity.
- It is linked to car and work accidents, physical abuse, and some kinds of cancer.
- During pregnancy, it can cause miscarriage, preterm birth, and stillbirth. It can also cause your baby to have lifelong mental and physical problems.

### Ways to Drink Less Alcohol

Do you drink more alcohol than is recommended? Review the ideas below for ways to drink less. Put a check mark by the ones you would be willing to try.

- Keep track of the alcohol you drink. Make sure you stay within the daily limit.
- At a bar or party, stay busy. Dance or play pool. Stand away from where drinks are served.
- Start with bottled water or a diet soft drink to quench your thirst. Then alternate — have water, juice, or a soft drink before you have another drink with alcohol.
- Try nonalcoholic wine, beer, or cocktails.
- Make each drink last longer. Sip rather than gulp. Put your glass down between sips. Drink at your own pace, not someone else's.
- Avoid salty snacks such as salted chips or nuts. These can make you thirsty.
- Do not let anyone top off your drinks. Have one drink at a time.
- Plan alcohol-free days.
- Practice saying “No, thank you” when offered a drink. Do not be pressured into drinking more than you plan to.
- Let your friends and family know that you plan to drink less and why. Find others to relax with who support your efforts to be healthy. Thank them for their support.

**Important:** Do you have trouble staying under the daily alcohol limits? If so, be sure to share this with your doctor or UPMC Health Plan health coach. Your health coach can give you resources and support.



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**Take Action**

	Check when completed
<p><b>My SMART Goal for This Week</b></p> <p>Do your best to reach the SMART* goal you set with your health coach. Write it here. Check the box when you have completed it.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>Staying on the Path to Wellness</b></p> <p>When you are ready, choose one or two tips above that you would like to put into action. Set a weekly SMART goal for each one. Write your goals here. Check the boxes when you have completed them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SMART Goal 1: _____ _____</li> <li>• SMART Goal 2: _____ _____</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>  <input type="checkbox"/>

\*SMART goals are specific, measurable, appropriate, realistic, and timely. For example, “I will only have one drink at Jim’s party on Saturday night. If I am offered more than that, I will say ‘No, thanks.’ I will stand away from where the drinks are being served.”

SMART goals help you succeed! If you have any trouble setting your weekly SMART goals, ask your health coach for help.

The information in this tip sheet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended or implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Before making changes, always talk to your doctor about what is right for you.



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