

ALCOHOL AND MEN'S HEALTH

AUSTRALIAN ALCOHOL GUIDELINES – FACT SHEET

Guidelines for men

To minimise risks in the short and longer term, and to gain any longer-term benefits, the alcohol drinking guidelines for men have been set by the National Health and Medical Research Council at:

- No more than 4 standard drinks a day *on average*;
- And no more than 6 standard drinks *on any one day*.
- One or two alcohol-free days a week.

Drinking habits

It has been conservatively estimated, based on recent surveys, that

- 11.1% of Australian males drink alcohol every day;
- 31% of males drink at least once a month at levels that placed them at risk of short-term harm (such as injury) from drinking;
- 10% of males are at risk of long-term health problems due to alcohol.

Alcohol related deaths and hospitalisations

Males have consistently had higher rates of alcohol-related deaths and hospitalisations than females have. It is estimated that in Australia, males accounted for approximately 70% of the 3,290 alcohol-related deaths in 1997, the 72,302 alcohol-related hospitalisations in 1996/97, and the 403,795 alcohol-related hospital bed-days in 1996/97. It has been calculated that 4% of male deaths are alcohol-related, with the main causes of such deaths being alcoholic liver cirrhosis, road injury, stroke, suicide and alcohol dependence.

Road injury

Alcohol is a major cause of road injury in Australia and male motorists are more frequently involved in alcohol-related road fatalities. On average, it has been calculated that between 1990-1996, over 70% of people with serious alcohol-related road injuries were male.

Physical violence

Alcohol related assaults are one of the main causes of male hospitalisation. In 1998/99, 74% of the 8,661 hospital admissions for alcohol-related assaults were male. Excessive alcohol has been found to be an important factor in 40-70% of violent crimes, and 70-80% of night-time assaults.

Sexual functioning

Alcohol can affect sexual functioning, particularly in men, who may find it more difficult to get an erection after drinking alcohol at risky or high risk levels. A long-term health consequence from regular excessive drinking is male impotence.

Suicide and suicidal behaviour

Heavy drinking is a major risk factor for suicide and suicidal behaviour. This is of particular concern in Australia, given the high and rising suicide rate in adult men.

Potential health benefits

The guidelines point to some health benefits of drinking small amounts of alcohol for middle-aged and older people. These include reducing the risk of heart disease. However, a combination of approaches, including exercise, improving diet and stopping smoking, achieves better results than drinking alone. People who choose not to drink alcohol should not be urged to drink to gain any potential health benefit.

For more information contact John Noble, Media Unit on 0413 890 241.