

Cancer Attributable to Alcohol Consumption

Overall, 10% of cancers in men and 3% in women were attributable to drinking.

Alcohol consumption is a risk factor for a number of cancers. However, the proportions of these cancers that are attributable to alcohol consumption are less clear. In this study, investigators determined the burden of cancer attributable to current and former alcohol consumption among 110,000 men and 255,000 women (age range, 35–70) in eight western European countries who were cancer-free at recruitment between 1992 and 2000. Follow-up ended between 2002 and 2005.

Overall, 10% of total cancers in men and 3% of total cancers in women were attributable to alcohol consumption. These percentages were higher for specific cancers. The alcohol-attributable fractions in men and women were, respectively, 44% and 25% for upper aerodigestive tract cancers, 33% and 18% for liver cancer, and 17% and 4% for colorectal cancer; the fraction for breast cancer was 5% in women. Consuming more than the recommended upper limit of alcohol (2 drinks daily for men and 1 drink daily for women) accounted for much of the alcohol-attributable fractions for all cancer categories (57%–87% in men and 40%–98% in women).

Comment: Although only small proportions of total cancers in men (10%) and women (3%) in this study were attributable to alcohol consumption, higher proportions of specific cancers — especially aerodigestive and liver cancers — were attributable to alcohol consumption. Much of the risk attributable to alcohol consumption, however, was associated with heavy consumption (>2 drinks daily for men and >1 drink daily for women) — a finding that should reassure to light-to-moderate drinkers.

— **Paul S. Mueller, MD, MPH, FACP**

Published in [Journal Watch General Medicine](#) May 17, 2011