

Alcohol Checklist

How to protect your liver if you drink alcohol

If there's one thing that most people understand about the liver it's that it serves as the body's liquor control board. When you have a glass of wine, beer or other liquor, the liver is in charge of processing this alcohol and detoxifying the blood.

Yet breaking down alcohol is only one of the liver's over 500 vital functions. This means it can only handle so much alcohol at once. If you overload your liver (drink too much at one time), the excess alcohol will end up circulating in your bloodstream affecting your brain, heart and other tissues resulting in you becoming increasingly intoxicated.



If you continue to drink excessively, either through binge drinking or by having multiple drinks on a daily basis, you're making your liver work continuous overtime. The consequences of this abuse may be the destruction of liver cells, a build-up of fat deposits in your liver (fatty liver), or more seriously, liver inflammation (alcoholic hepatitis), permanent scarring (cirrhosis) or even liver cancer.

There is no hard and fast rule regarding how much you can drink without damaging your liver. The following are some tips to consider when deciding whether or not to have that first drink or to order the next round.

- Don't try to keep up 'drink for drink' with your friends who may have a higher tolerance for alcohol. You may think you 'know your limit' but the truth is your gender, nationality, weight and health, determine how much alcohol is "safe".
- Don't choose your drinks based on the belief that one form of alcohol is not as harmful as another. The amount of alcohol – not the type – is what matters. One 'drink' is equivalent to 12 oz. (341 ml) of beer, 5 oz. (142 ml) of wine, 3 oz. (86 ml) of sherry or port, 1.5 oz. (43 ml) of spirits. Each has the same effect on the liver whether taken alone or diluted.
- Never mix alcohol and medication. The combination of acetaminophen and alcohol for example, can lead to liver failure.
- If you're a woman, don't give in to peer pressure to drink more than you might otherwise. Women absorb more alcohol than men and therefore are more susceptible to alcohol-related liver disease even if they consume less alcohol.



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- If you have hepatitis or any other form of liver disease, avoid alcohol completely. Alcohol can compound ongoing damage to the liver.
- Don't play 'drinking games' which encourage excessive consumption of alcohol within a short period of time.
- Limit your alcohol consumption to one or two drinks, but never on a daily basis. As far as your liver is concerned, the safest amount of alcohol is no alcohol at all.

The liver nurtures and protects your body and plays a critical role in maintaining overall health. For more information on liver health, please contact the Canadian Liver Foundation at 1-800-563-5483 or visit www.liver.ca