

Revised health guidelines urge much less alcohol consumption

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Late in 2020, the National Health and Medical Research Council released its latest Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol. These lowered the recommended maximum that health adults

Australians should drink over a week from 14 standard drinks to 10. The guidelines also advised pregnant or breastfeeding women, as well as young people aged under 18 years, to avoid alcohol altogether.

A guideline summary published today in the *Medical Journal of Australia* reviews the logic and the evidence behind the revisions. The authors of the article include the members of the national committee responsible for revising these guidelines on alcohol consumption. The authors set out a summary of the rigorous 4-year process of evidence review that underpinned the finished product. They describe the current guidelines, including how and why they differ from the previous, 2009, guidelines.

That extensive evidence review considered both [health harms](#) and potential health benefits of drinking alcohol.

The guidelines now state unequivocally that for [healthy adults](#) "the less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol." This statement was added "to clarify that any level of drinking can convey some risk of harm," wrote the authors of the summary, led by Professor Katherine Conigrave, a Senior Staff Specialist at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital in Sydney, and the University of Sydney.

The three recommendations are:

- Guideline 1: "To reduce the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury, healthy men and women should drink no more than ten [standard drinks](#) a week and no more than four standard drinks on any one day. The less you drink, the lower your risk of harm from alcohol."
- Guideline 2: "To reduce the risk of injury and other harms to health, children and people under 18 years of age should not drink alcohol."

- Guideline 3: "To prevent harm from alcohol to their unborn child, women who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy should not drink alcohol. For women who are breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is safest for their baby."

"Furthermore, individuals with health conditions are again advised to seek medical advice on drinking. For pregnancy, breastfeeding and people aged under 18 years, the guidance not to drink alcohol was made clearer."

More information: Katherine M Conigrave et al, Revision of the Australian guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2021). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.51336](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.51336)

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