

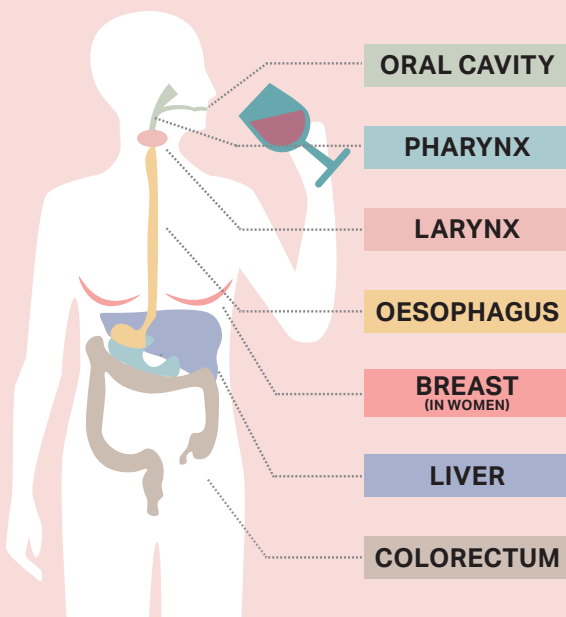
ALCOHOL AND CANCER IN THE EUROPEAN UNION A CALL TO ACTION

Cancer is currently the **second-leading cause of death in the European Union (EU)**, where numbers of cancer cases and deaths are on the rise. While cancer is a complex disease, influenced by environmental and genetic factors, it is also largely affected by the same behaviours as many other noncommunicable diseases (NCDs): **tobacco smoking, alcohol use, physical inactivity, and unhealthy diets.**

Europe has the highest level of alcohol drinking globally. **7 of the top 10 countries with the highest alcohol consumption are in the EU**, where approximately 240,000 people died because of alcohol in 2019, and **3 out of every 10 alcohol-attributable deaths were due to cancer¹.**

¹ WHO, Global Health Observatory, 2023.

THE EVIDENCE ON ALCOHOL AND CANCER IS NOT NEW



As early as 1988, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classified alcoholic beverages as carcinogenic - substances that can cause or promote the development of cancer in humans ².

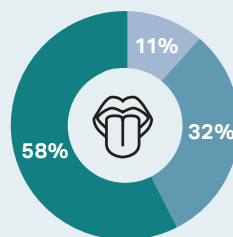
ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION CAN CAUSE 7 TYPES OF CANCER

It's not about what you drink. **Any alcoholic beverage can cause cancer** because the ethanol in alcoholic beverages and the acetaldehyde it produces in the body are carcinogenic. There are many ways in which alcohol can cause cancer, including through DNA damage.

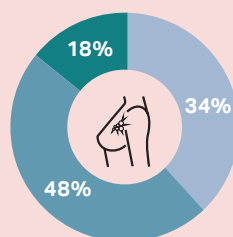
² IARC Monographs on the Evaluation of Carcinogenic Risks to Humans. Lyon: International Agency for Research on Cancer, 1987.

PROPORTION OF CANCER CASES DUE TO ALCOHOL IN THE EU

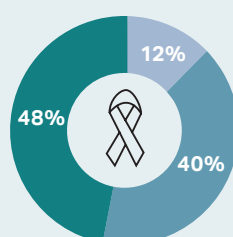
ORAL CAVITY



BREAST CANCER (IN WOMEN)



ALL CANCER SITES



EVEN SMALL AMOUNTS OF ALCOHOL CAN CAUSE CANCER, PARTICULARLY IN WOMEN

Drinking small amounts of alcohol increases the risk of cancer, and the more alcohol you drink, the higher the risk becomes.

The relationship between the amount of alcohol you drink, and the increased risk of cancer differs by cancer type. For some cancers, like breast cancer, even a small amount of alcohol can increase the risk.

More than half of all cancers caused by alcohol consumption are not due to heavy drinking but moderate and risky drinking. Nearly a third of breast cancers caused by alcohol drinking among women are due to moderate drinking³.

Moderate drinking: a maximum of two drinks, or 20g of pure alcohol, per day

Risky drinking: 3–6 drinks, or a maximum of 60g of pure alcohol, per day

Heavy drinking: six drinks, or 60g of pure alcohol, or more per day

³ WHO & IARC, Alcohol and cancer in the WHO European Region: an appeal for better prevention, 2020.

Note: The WHO Regional Office for Europe does not define risk levels in categories as such, for the specific definitions please see: WHO & IARC, Alcohol and cancer in the WHO European Region: an appeal for better prevention, 2020.

MOST EUROPEANS DON'T KNOW THAT ALCOHOL CAUSES CANCER

While most Europeans correctly identify tobacco smoking as a risk factor for cancer, **the awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer is much lower.** Less than half of Europeans can name alcohol as a risk factor for developing cancer, although knowledge differs across countries.

Awareness of the link between alcohol and different cancer types varies and is particularly low for breast cancer. Only **10 to 20%** of people asked about the causes of female breast cancer named alcohol consumption as a cause, while **40%** of respondents correctly linked liver cancer to drinking alcohol⁴.

⁴ Daša Kokole, Carina Ferreira-Borges, Gauden Galea, Alexander Tran, Jürgen Rehm, Maria Neufeld, Public awareness of the alcohol-cancer link in the EU and UK: a scoping review, European Journal of Public Health, 2023.

THE PRICE THAT EUROPEANS PAY FOR DRINKING

In 2020, alcohol consumption was estimated to cause 111,300 new cases of cancer in the EU (4.1% of all new cases). Almost 70% of these cases were in men, partly because they drink about three times as much alcohol as women.

Most cancers caused by alcohol in the EU were of the **colorectum** (36,900 cases), **breast** (24,200 cases), and **oral cavity** (12,400 cases).

The economic cost of premature deaths from cancer in 2018 was estimated to be €52.9 billion in the EU, out of which **€4.58 billion was attributed to alcohol-related cancers, accounting for 9% of the total cost**⁵.

⁵ H. Rumgay, M. Ortega-Ortega, L. Sharp, N. Lunet, I. Soerjomataram. The cost of premature death from cancer attributable to alcohol: Productivity losses in Europe in 2018, Cancer Epidemiology, Volume 84, 2023.



IT'S TIME TO ACT NOW

Reducing cancer risk means identifying and limiting exposure to carcinogens, such as alcohol. Alcohol-related cancers can be prevented by reducing alcohol consumption at both the individual and population level: reducing the prevalence of drinking and reducing the amount that people drink. **The most effective strategies to reduce alcohol consumption are raising taxes, reducing availability and restricting or banning advertising.**

It is also crucial to **improve awareness** of the association between alcohol and cancer by:

Adding cancer warnings to alcohol labels, akin to tobacco products, in alignment with the EU Beating Cancer Plan

Implementing policies that empower healthcare professionals to address alcohol drinking, identify risks and guide behavioural change

LESS ALCOHOL CONSUMED = LOWER CANCER RISK