**Drinking Alcohol Increases Cancer Risk**

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of developing cancer, yet only 13% of adults are aware of the link.  

Dawn Connelly

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**Evolvion of Alcohol Consumption in the UK**

Alcohol consumption has decreased in 17 of the 35 OECD countries over the past 15 years. However, consumption in the UK has decreased slightly during this time. Indonesia has the lowest drinking levels, while Lithuania has the highest.

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**Current Recommended Low-Risk Drinking Levels**

The Chief Medical Officers’ guidelines were revised on 8 January 2016 and apply to both men and women. To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level:

- Do not drink more than 14 units per week.
- If you do drink as much as 14 units per week, spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days.
- Having several drink-free days each week can help you to cut down.

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**What Can Pharmacists Do?**

Some community pharmacies in the UK provide alcohol screening and brief intervention services. However, there is a huge unmet need for interventions.

6.5% of people drinking at risky levels received advice from a health professional in the past year.

50.4% of smokers received advice from a health professional in the past year.

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**INFOGRAPHIC**

**Alcohol Consumption and Cancer Risk**

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of seven types of cancer. Between 4%–6% of all new cancers in the UK in 2015 were caused by alcohol consumption. Even drinking small amounts increases the risk of some cancers and the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has classified alcohol as a group 1 carcinogen.

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**INFOGRAPHIC**

**Estimated annual cancer cases attributable to alcohol in the UK, 2011**

When ingested, alcohol is broken down into a toxic chemical called acetaldehyde. This chemical damages the DNA inside cells and stops them from repairing the damage.