Canada’s Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines

Presented by
Dr. Catherine Paradis, Senior Research & Policy Analyst

Discovery Conference
April 19th, 2017
About CCSA

• Vision: A healthier Canadian society where evidence transforms approaches to substance use.

• Mission: To address issues of substance use in Canada by providing national leadership and harnessing the power of evidence to generate coordinated action.

• Value Proposition: CCSA was created by Parliament to provide national leadership to address substance use in Canada. A trusted counsel, we provide national guidance to decision makers by harnessing the power of research, curating knowledge and bringing together diverse perspectives.
CCSA’s National Priorities and Areas of Action

Collective action for collective impact

- Children & Youth
- Cannabis
- Prescription Drugs
- Alcohol
- Impaired Driving
- Treatment & Recovery
- Workforce Development
- Monitoring & Surveillance
- Canada’s Indigenous People
- Problematic Substance use & Co-occurring Issues

as presented at Discovery 2017 on April 19 in Toronto
National Alcohol Strategy

- Developed through consensus by the National Alcohol Strategy (NAS) Working Group, including 25 representatives from federal, provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations, researchers and alcohol industry.

- The 41 NAS recommendations collectively impact policies and behaviour to address alcohol harms.
Implementing the NAS

National Alcohol Strategy Advisory Committee (NASAC)

- 25 multi-sector experts lead the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NAS recommendations, including those dealing with:
  - Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRDGs); screening, brief intervention and referral; standard drink labels; price policies; and municipal alcohol policies
- Co-chaired by the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, Mothers Against Drunk Driving Canada and CCSA
Why LRDGs?

These national guidelines were developed:

• To provide consistent advice to all Canadians to reduce long- and short-term health risks
• To increase awareness of safer drinking levels and to educate about standard drink sizes
• To reflect the latest scientific literature that identifies both significant risks and some possible benefits from low levels of alcohol consumption
## History of LRDGs in Canada

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Limits for Men</th>
<th>Limits for Women</th>
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<tr>
<td>aLPHa, CAMH, OPHA (1997)</td>
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<td>2 per day 9 per week</td>
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<td>CARBC (2007)</td>
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<td>3 on single day 10 per week</td>
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<td>CFPC (1994)</td>
<td>4 per day 12 per week</td>
<td>3 per day 12 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educ’alcool (2007)</td>
<td>5 on single occasion 14 per week</td>
<td>4 on single occasion 9 per week</td>
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Evidence-informed Guidance: Expert Advisors

Expert Advisory Panel

- Chaired by Dr. Peter Butt, College of Family Physicians of Canada
- Researchers from each Canadian organization that previously issued low-risk drinking guidelines: CCSA, Centre on Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Centre for Addictions Research of BC (CARBC), College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and Educ’alcool

Peer Review: International experts and NASAC members
LRDGs

For these guidelines, “a drink” means:

Your limits
Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:
- 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days
- 15 drinks a week for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days

Plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

Special occasions
Reduce your risk of injury and harm by drinking no more than 3 drinks (for women) or 4 drinks (for men) on any single occasion.

Plan to drink in a safe environment. Stay within the weekly limits outlined above in Your limits.

When zero’s the limit
Do not drink when you are:
- driving a vehicle or using machinery and tools
- taking medicine or other drugs that interact with alcohol
- doing any kind of dangerous physical activity
- living with mental or physical health problems
- living with alcohol dependence
- pregnant or planning to be pregnant
- responsible for the safety of others
- making important decisions

Pregnant?
Zero is safest
If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, or about to breastfeed, the safest choice is to drink no alcohol at all.

Delay your drinking
Alcohol can harm the way the body and brain develop. Teens should speak with their parents about drinking. If they choose to drink, they should do so under parental guidance, never more than 1-2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1-2 times per week. They should plan ahead, follow local alcohol laws and consider the Safer drinking tips listed in this brochure.

Youth in their late teens to age 24 years should never exceed the daily and weekly limits outlined in Your limits.
LRDGs – Long-term health

Your limits

Reduce your long-term health risks by drinking no more than:

• 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days
• 15 drinks a week for men, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days

Plan non-drinking days every week to avoid developing a habit.

Special occasions

When

Do not drink:

• drink
• smoke
• take medications
• do anything else that might affect your health
LRDGs – Injury and harm

Special occasions

Reduce your risk of injury and harm by drinking no more than 3 drinks (for women) or 4 drinks (for men) on any single occasion.

Plan to drink in a safe environment. Stay within the weekly limits outlined above in *Your limits*. 
LRDGs – Specific contexts

**When zero’s the limit**

Do not drink when you are:

- driving a vehicle or using machinery and tools
- taking medicine or other drugs that interact with alcohol
- doing any kind of dangerous physical activity
- living with mental or physical health problems
- living with alcohol dependence
- pregnant or planning to be pregnant
- responsible for the safety of others
- making important decisions

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LRDGs – Pregnancy

Pregnant? Zero is safest
If you are pregnant or planning to become pregnant, or about to breastfeed, the safest choice is to drink no alcohol at all.
Delay your drinking
Delay your drinking

Alcohol can harm the way the body and brain develop. Teens should speak with their parents about drinking. If they choose to drink, they should do so under parental guidance; never more than 1–2 drinks at a time, and never more than 1–2 times per week. They should plan ahead, follow local alcohol laws and consider the Safer drinking tips listed in this brochure.

Youth in their late teens to age 24 years should never exceed the daily and weekly limits outlined in Your limits.
LRDGs – Drinking Tips

• Set limits for yourself and stick to them
• Drink slowly, no more than 2 drinks in any 3 hours
• For every drink of alcohol, have one non-alcoholic drink
• Eat before and while you are drinking
• Always consider your age, body weight and health problems that might suggest lower limits
• While drinking may provide health benefits for certain groups of people, do not start to drink or increase your drinking for health benefits
Why Do Limits Differ for Men and Women?

• On average, women weigh less and so reach higher blood alcohol levels compared to men.
• Women have more adipose tissue (fat), causing alcohol to be absorbed more slowly and the effects of alcohol to take longer to wear off.
• Women have less water in their bodies to dilute alcohol
• Women have lower levels of the enzymes that break down alcohol.
Why Do Limits Differ for Adults and Youth?

• Last to mature is their frontal lobe, which is involved in planning, strategizing, organisation, concentration and attention

• The adolescent brain has more neurons than the adult brain. This gives it enormous plasticity and young people sometimes have better memory functions and cognitive skills than adults.
Evidence-informed Guidance: Literature Review

- Search conducted on multiple bibliographic databases for:
  - Systematic reviews and meta-analyses on impact of alcohol on disease and injury (17 found)
  - Emergency department research examined for short-term or “acute” risk of injury after drinking within previous 6-hour period
- Critical appraisal of reviews and single studies
- Relative risk preferred to absolute risk
- All-cause mortality studies used to find balance point between risks and benefits
### Risk of Premature Death (females)

<table>
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<th>Type of Illness or Disease</th>
<th>Proportion of All Deaths, 2002–2005*</th>
<th>Percentage Increase/Decrease in Risk</th>
<th>1 Drink</th>
<th>2 Drinks</th>
<th>3–4 Drinks</th>
<th>5–6 Drinks</th>
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Resources to Promote LRDGs

For these guidelines, “a drink” means:

- **Beer**
  341 ml (12 oz.)
  5% alcohol content

- **Cider/Cooler**
  341 ml (12 oz.)
  5% alcohol content

- **Wine**
  142 ml (5 oz.)
  12% alcohol content

- **Distilled Alcohol**
  (rye, gin, rum, etc.)
  43 ml (1.5 oz.)
  40% alcohol content

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Resources to Promote LRDGs
Resources to Promote LRDGs

Women and Alcohol
The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines (LRDGs) were based on research and were created to promote responsible alcohol consumption that could benefit their health and well-being. These guidelines include policies that can help reduce the harm that alcohol can cause. Women need to know the signal that tells us the female body is more sensitive to alcohol.

Why Are the Guidelines Different for Women and Men?
Women are generally more susceptible to the effects of alcohol because:
- Women generally weigh less and people who weigh less reach higher blood alcohol levels compared to people who weigh more. So, it’s normal for men to have a higher blood alcohol level than women of the same weight.
- Women experience differences in liver size and structure, which can cause a higher level of alcohol to be absorbed more slowly and the effects of alcohol to last longer to wear off.
- Women have less water in their bodies to dilute alcohol. So, women are also a matter of the same weight which drink an equal amount of alcohol; a woman’s blood alcohol concentration will be higher.
- Women have two types of the enzymes that break down alcohol, whereas the heavier types of enzymes that break down alcohol in a woman’s system may develop.

Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines for Men and Women
To reduce long-term health risks, the LRDGs recommend:
- Women consume no more than 2 drinks a week and no more than 2 drinks a day most days.
- Men consume no more than 1 drink a night and no more than 2 drinks a day most days.

To reduce the risk of injury and harm, the LRDGs also recommend that:
- Women consume no more than 2 drinks in any single occasion and drink within weekly limits.
- Men consume no more than 4 drinks in any single occasion and stay within weekly limits.

Remember, these numbers are upper limits for safer drinking, not goals.

Youth and Alcohol
The Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines (LRDGs) are based on research and were created to promote responsible alcohol consumption that could benefit their health and safety. The research suggests that one or two drinks per occasion or not more than two drinks a day can help prevent harm to physical, mental, and emotional health. Youth drinking alcohol is legal in most places, but NOT if under legal drinking age. If you’re YOUNG and you drink, you should know that specific drinking guidelines point to pink.

What Are the Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines for Youth?
Canada’s LRDG recommends that youth up to the legal drinking age:
- Speak to your parents about drinking.
- Never have more than one or two drinks per occasion.
- Never drink more than one or two drinks per day.

Canada’s LRGD recommends that from the legal drinking age to age 24 years:
- Females never more than two drinks a day and never more than 2 drinks all week.
- Males never have more than three drinks a day and never more than 1 drink a week.
- Males must be 21 years or older to drink.
- Males must be 21 years or older to drink.

The Reason for Drinking Guidelines for Youth
Just like the body, the human brain is still developing throughout adolescence and early adulthood, until about 24 years of age. The frontal lobe is the last part of the brain to mature and is involved in planning, decision-making, self-control, and self-control. Without it, drinking alcohol while driving can lead to impaired judgment and coordination.

Cancer and Alcohol
The Low-Risk Drinking Guidelines (LRDGs) are based on research and were created to promote responsible alcohol consumption that could benefit their health and safety. Alcohol consumption and cancer risk are related. Alcohol intake is a known risk factor for a variety of cancers, including liver, breast, and colon. Responsible alcohol consumption is an easy way to reduce the risk of developing cancer. To reduce the risk of developing cancer, you can:
- Drink less than 1 drink per day.
- Drink more than 1 drink per day.

Drinking Guidelines to Reduce the Risk of Developing Cancer
To reduce long-term health risks for multiple cancers, the LRGD recommends:
- Women consume no more than 1 drink a day and no more than 2 drinks a week.
- Men consume no more than 2 drinks a day and no more than 3 drinks a day.

Toronto, ON, Canada

Resources to Promote LRDGs

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The SBIR Website

Alcohol Screening, Brief Intervention & Referral
Helping patients reduce alcohol-related risks

1. Screening and Assessment
   - Identify patients who drink alcohol beyond low-risk consumption levels and further assess their at-risk status based on reported alcohol use and other relevant clinical information:
     - Screen for at-risk drinking
     - Determine level of risk

2. Brief Intervention and Referral
   - Communicate patient’s risk status, help patient identify goals and readiness to change, make referral as appropriate:
     - Conduct brief intervention
     - Assess readiness to change
     - Refer to appropriate resources

3. Follow-up and Support
   - Follow up with patients, monitor withdrawal symptoms, and review goals and progress:
     - Assess progress towards goals
     - Monitor and manage withdrawal

www.sbir-diba.ca
If everyone in Canada followed the LRDGs and light drinkers did not increase consumption, then it is estimated that:

- Alcohol consumption would **decrease** by approximately 50%
- Alcohol-related deaths would **decrease** by approximately 4,600 per year
CTADS 2012

- About a fifth of Canadians report knowing about the LRDGs.
- Females are more likely than males to report knowing about the LRDGs.
- Canadians aged under 35 are less likely to report knowing about the LRDGs.
The case of Educ’alcool

- Invested a total of $7.5 million over the past five years to disseminate and promote the LRDGs.
- In 2016, the organisation, reached all its awareness objectives (over 8 out 10 Quebercers know the LRDGs)
- Among Quebec drinkers, 19.4% exceeds LRDG chronic (National average = 20%)
- Among Quebec drinkers, 13.5% exceeds LRDG acute (National average = 15.4%)
Lessons Learned

- Seek endorsement
- Epidemiology is a science, not the “Truth”
  - Need to incorporate evidence beyond epidemiological risk estimates
  - Expert judgment has a necessary, legitimate and important role in developing guidelines.
  - Need to consider how particular definitions of low risk relate to ethical standpoints of risk, individual freedom and the particular role of the state and the health authorities.
- Knowledge transfer resources should always be in the back of your mind.
Save the Date / Dates à retenir

ISSUES of SUBSTANCE CONFERENCE 2017

Addiction matters • La dépendance, ça compte

November 13–15 Calgary, Alberta

as presented at Discovery 2017 on April 19 in Toronto

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www.ccsa.ca • www.cclt.ca
Contact Information

For further information on the National Alcohol Strategy, including the LRDGs, please contact:

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