

# Overall Health

## The effects of alcohol and its health impacts may be higher in women.

- For the same amount of alcohol, women generally reach a **higher blood alcohol level** than men if only the influence of biological sex is taken into account.
- Women are at higher risk of **breast cancer** and alcohol-related liver disease.
- Women are more likely to experience **negative effects** of alcohol on their **psychological health**.

Considering only the influence of biological sex on alcohol metabolism, women need a smaller amount to feel the effects of alcohol.<sup>1</sup> Their bodies are usually made up of more fats that slow down the absorption of alcohol. Conversely, they contain less water to dilute alcohol and fewer enzymes responsible for eliminating alcohol.<sup>1</sup> However, other factors such as weight, age and health status play a role.<sup>1</sup>

This partly explains why women's risk of developing alcohol-related diseases increases more rapidly, especially breast cancer and liver disease.<sup>2</sup> A group of citizens consulted as part of the Women and Alcohol project reported that the most significant negative effects of alcohol were on their physical health.<sup>3</sup> However, it appears that few of them are truly aware of the health risks of alcohol.<sup>3</sup> They know more about the effects of alcohol on pregnancy, breastfeeding and the unborn child.<sup>3</sup>

Although women are more likely to experience the negative impacts of alcohol consumption on their well-being,<sup>4</sup> more than one in ten report experiencing positive effects on their mental and psychological health.<sup>3</sup> The desired effects of drinking are particularly evident among women who report poor mental health: half of them consume alcohol to relieve stress and anxiety.<sup>3</sup>

Although alcohol can reduce women's genital arousal,<sup>5</sup> and poses safety risks, many young women report positive effects of alcohol use on their sexual health.<sup>3</sup> These women see alcohol as a substance that facilitates intimate relationships.<sup>6</sup>



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