



Dr KC Wong



The Dangers of Alcohol

Alcoholic beverages are commonly consumed for social and recreational purposes. Alcohol is metabolised mainly in the liver to carbon dioxide and water. Excessive consumption of alcohol can lead to psycho-social, economic and medical problems. Alcohol abuse easily leads to addiction.

Alcohol abuse

The latest Malaysian National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS) in 2011 found that 15% of Malaysians abused alcohol. Another survey by WHO revealed that alcoholics frequently performed 25% below average and around 30% of road accidents in Malaysia are caused by drinking and driving.

People who drink alcohol may not even be aware that they are indulging in risky behaviour. Excessive consumption of alcohol may have extensive and far-reaching effects on the brain, heart, liver, stomach and endocrine systems.

Even moderate drinking can lead to short-term impairment. It is believed that the damage done to the body may be a result of the direct effect of alcohol on the brain, malnutrition or from severe liver disease.

Alcohol dependency, which is also called addiction or alcoholism, is considered a chronic disease with increasing alcohol intake with each progressive stage which can ultimately end in social incapacity and death. However some alcohol abusers can return to controlled drinking or abstinence.

Drinking habits defined

In order to determine your level of risk and know your limits, you should be aware of your alcohol habits. Excessive use of alcohol is defined as:

- Binge drinking - the consumption of alcohol within 2 hours at a single sitting of more than 5 drinks at a time for men, and more than 4 at a time for women
- Heavy drinking - an average consumption of more than 2 drinks per day or more than 14 drinks per week for men, and more than 1 drink per day or more than 7 drinks per week for women

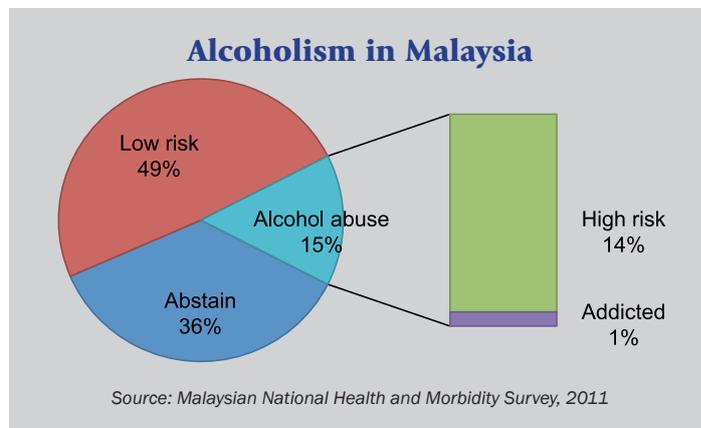
If alcohol is a part of your lifestyle, consider stopping this habit, or at the very least, moderating it. Try to aim for less than 3 drinks a day to reduce the risk of developing:

- Anaemia
- Cancer- Oesophageal and liver cancer
- Cardiovascular diseases
- Cirrhosis
- Dementia
- Muscle injury
- Seizures
- Gout
- High blood pressure
- Infectious disease
- Nerve damage
- Pancreatitis

Staying healthy

Our digestive system is very adaptable and does not often exhibit any external symptoms in the early stages of a disease. The onset of symptoms usually means that the disease is in its late stages, and there is often very little that can be done to reverse the damage.

If you value your life, start practicing a healthy lifestyle. Healthy lifestyle modifications mean eating healthily, maintaining a physically active lifestyle, and avoiding smoking and alcohol consumption.



Dr KC Wong is a consultant physician (Internal Medicine) of the Digestive Health Advisory Board. The author is not associated with and does not endorse any brands or products. This article is courtesy of the Digestive Health Advisory Board and supported by the VITAGEN Healthy Digestion Programme.