

Approaching the New Year, you may be considering things like Dry January or giving up alcohol entirely.

If you're looking for more reasons to switch from cocktails to mocktails, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR)'s newest study may encourage you to embrace sobriety.

The AACR published its [2024 Cancer Progress Report](#), showcasing that excessive alcohol use increases an individual's risk of developing six types of cancer.

- Certain types of head and neck cancer
- Esophageal squamous cell carcinoma
- Breast cancer
- Colorectal cancer
- Liver cancer
- Stomach cancers

The study goes on to say that in 2019, 5.4% of cancers were attributed to alcohol consumption. The AACR's research suggests that by drinking less, or not at all, it can decrease your risk of getting the above-mentioned cancers by 8% and lessen the risk of all cancers by 4%.

Jeanna Rich is an oncology registered dietitian with OSF Cancer Support Services. She says that part of the reason excessive alcohol can affect so many different parts of the body, is because alcohol touches tissue inside the body at most of these places.

"All alcohol contains ethanol, so one alcohol beverage is not safer than the other because they all contain that ethanol component. That can essentially damage or oxidize healthy cells and create DNA damage," Rich says. "In regard to breast cancer, alcohol can actually increase the levels of estrogen in our body, it can lead to excessive calorie intake, which can lead to obesity."

Rich says the increase in estrogen is what increases the risk of breast cancer.

Heavy drinking can lead to poor sleep, malnutrition

"Sleep is essential," Rich says, noting that late nights drinking oftentimes leads to a poor night's sleep.

"People who are choosing to drink a large amount of alcohol are not eating or drinking other nourishing items, so then they're deficient in other healthy nutrients," Rich adds.

From cocktails to mocktails

"Why do people drink? Sometimes it's a social factor, sometimes it's for relaxation like going out to dinner with friends and having a glass of wine," Rich says, adding it's becoming more common to have mocktails on menus at restaurants. "The sober lifestyle trend is becoming very popular. Especially with the New Year coming up, people like to stay sober for a month and see how your body feels, it does make a difference."

Rich says other than being trendy and fun, if you make them right, mocktails can have beneficial nutrients.

The National Foundation for Cancer Research (NFCR) has year-round and holiday-themed mocktail recipes [here](#). The NFCR reports that most Americans double their alcohol intake between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

"Some can even include cancer-fighting nutrients like cranberries, teas and mints. So, taking that risk factor away, not only takes away the damage that's going to cause your body, but then it provides you with a cancer-fighting nutritional component that's going to enhance your overall health," Rich says.

Avoid alcohol completely during cancer treatment

On a cancer journey, it's important to discuss alcohol with your medical team. Rich says it's imperative to completely avoid alcohol if you're under treatment.

"Alcohol needs to be detoxed through our liver. Our liver will choose to focus on alcohol first, versus doing other jobs," Rich says. "We are essentially robbing our body of using our cancer treatment and using nutrition to help keep our bodies fighting that cancer. The overall message is to not drink alcohol during cancer treatment and have that conversation with your health care provider or dietitian, to make sure you understand why you're avoiding alcohol."

To learn more about nutrition during a cancer journey, visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#).