Health Bulletin

Drinking in moderation and the added risks of smoking this holiday season



3-minute alcohol risk self-check (AUDIT-C)

Add the points for your answers to get a total score from 0 to 12.

One drink contains about 10 g of pure alcohol. Examples include a small glass of beer (250 mL, about half a medium bottle), half a serving of sake (90 mL), just under a glass of wine (100 mL), a single whisky (30 mL), or half a serving of shochu with hot water (50 mL of shochu).

Question	0 points	1 point	2 points	3 points	4 points
Q1. How often do you drink alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2–4 days a month	2–3 days a week	4+ days a week
Q2. How many drinks do you usually have on a drinking day?	1–2 drinks	3–4 drinks	5–6 drinks	7–9 drinks	10+ drinks
Q3. How often do you have 6 or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Almost daily

0–5 (men) or 0–3 (women) Keep drinking in moderation.

6+ (men) or 4+ (women) **Your drinking may be putting you at risk.**

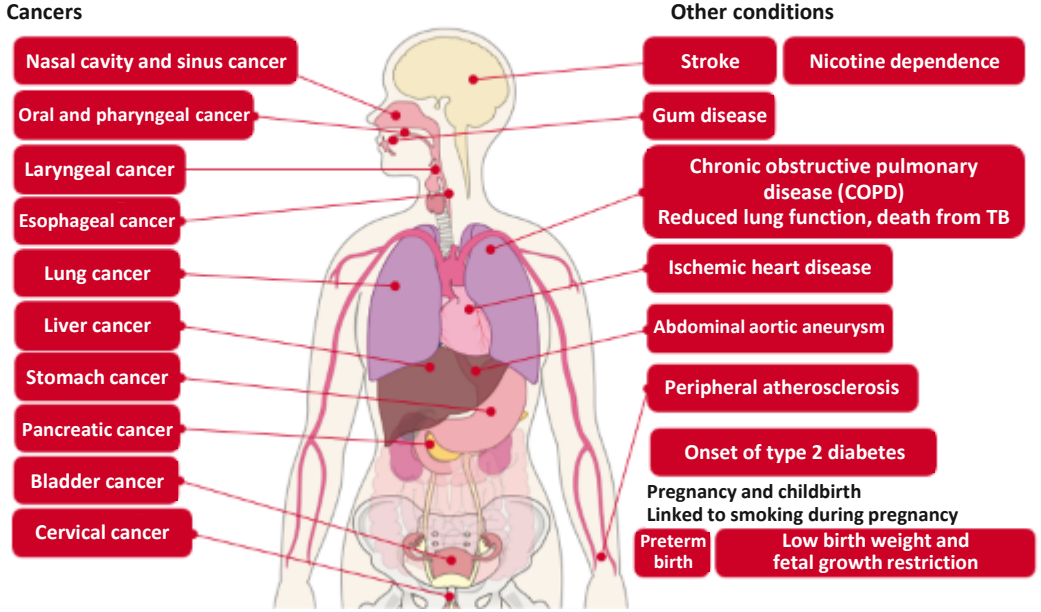
Take the full 10-question AUDIT to assess your drinking.



Smoking is the leading preventable cause of death

Smoking is linked to diseases throughout the body, including cancer and stroke. Starting at a younger age raises the risk of death.

Health effects on smokers **Level 1** **Evidence is sufficient to infer a causal relationship.**



⚠ Secondhand smoke also harms health

Smoke from a burning cigarette and smoke breathed out by a smoker both contain harmful substances. Secondhand smoke endangers the health and lives of people nearby. The evidence also meets Level 1.

- **Cardiovascular disease** includes stroke and ischemic heart disease, such as heart attacks.
- **Lung cancer**
- **Pregnancy and child health** effects include sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) and a history of asthma.
- **Unpleasant effects** include odor and nasal irritation.

Source Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare
Smoking and Health. Report of the Study Group on the Health Effects of Smoking.

The combined risks of drinking and smoking

Drinking and smoking together can increase health risks beyond those of either habit alone.

1. About 2–3 times the risk of heart attack or stroke

Alcohol can raise blood pressure, while smoking narrows blood vessels. Together, they make blood vessel blockages and ruptures more likely.

2. Higher risk of cancers throughout the body

Alcohol can damage mucous membranes, which makes it easier to absorb harmful substances from tobacco. This raises the risk of cancers of the esophagus, stomach, colon and rectum, liver, and lungs.

3. Poorer sleep and next-day fatigue or mistakes

Sleep becomes lighter as your body breaks down alcohol. Nicotine's stimulating effect makes you more likely to wake during the night. The next day, you may feel sluggish, have trouble concentrating, or be more likely to have an accident.

Heated tobacco risks and quit-smoking treatment

About 40% of smokers use heated tobacco, particularly younger smokers.

⚠ Heated tobacco products can still harm health

Heated tobacco products contain lower levels of harmful substances other than nicotine. Their long-term effects on health are still unclear. Any exposure to tobacco smoke can harm smokers and people around them.

⚠ Quit-smoking treatment covered by health insurance

Japan's health insurance has covered treatment for users of heated tobacco products since 2020.

You must meet all three criteria for coverage

1. Have a diagnosis of nicotine dependence (a screening score of 5 or more).
2. Ages 35+ need a smoking index of 200 or more (cigarettes per day × years smoked). Ages 34 and under are exempt from this threshold.
3. Be ready to quit now and agree to the treatment plan.

Treatment runs for 12 weeks (3 months), with 5 visits for medical advice and medication such as patches or pills. Online visits are available.

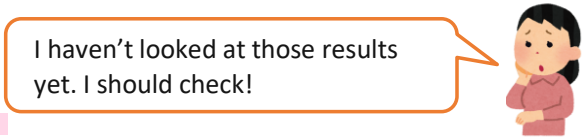
With a 30% copay, treatment costs about ¥13,000–¥20,000, roughly what 1–2 months of cigarettes cost.



Health checkup values for drinking and smoking



Checkup item	Normal range	Yellow (caution)	Red Tests or treatment
γ-GTP (GGT)	50 U/L or less	51–99 U/L	**100 U/L or higher**
Blood pressure	Below 120/80 mmHg	120–139 / 80–89 mmHg	**140/90 mmHg or higher**
Triglycerides	Below 150 mg/dL	—	**150 mg/dL or higher**
Fasting glucose	99 mg/dL or less	100–125 mg/dL	**126 mg/dL or higher**
HbA1c	5.5% or less	5.6–6.4%	**6.5% or higher**
Hemoglobin	Men 13.1–16.3 g/dL Women 12.1–14.5 g/dL	—	**Men ≥16.4 g/dL** **Women ≥14.6 g/dL**



Five tips for drinking in moderation

1 Eat before you drink

Alcohol is absorbed quickly on an empty stomach, so you feel its effects faster. Eating even a little beforehand slows absorption.

2 Match each drink with the same amount of water

Alcohol increases urination, which can lead to dehydration and hangovers. Drinking water between alcoholic drinks eases the strain and slows your pace.

3 Set a limit before you start drinking

It gets harder to stop once you start drinking. Set a limit beforehand, such as one can, to avoid drinking too much.

4 Take at least two alcohol-free days a week

Drinking every day strains your liver and can contribute to fatty liver and other chronic conditions. Give your body at least two days off alcohol each week.

5 Take care with driving or hazardous work the next morning

Even one can of beer can take about 4–5 hours to clear. Sleep can slow that process, and alcohol may still be in your system when you wake.