

Alcohol Factsheet

Harmful Effects Of Alcohol

Key facts

- The harmful use of alcohol results in 2.5 million deaths each year.
 - 320 000 young people between the age of 15 and 29 die from alcohol-related causes, resulting in 9% of all deaths in that age group.
 - Alcohol is the world's third largest risk factor for disease burden; it is the leading risk factor in the Western Pacific and the Americas and the second largest in Europe.
 - Alcohol is associated with many serious social and developmental issues, including violence, child neglect and abuse, and absenteeism in the workplace.
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The harmful use of alcohol is a global problem which compromises both individual and social development. It results in 2.5 million deaths each year. It also causes harm far beyond the physical and psychological health of the drinker. It harms the well-being and health of people around the drinker. An intoxicated person can harm others or put them at risk of traffic accidents or violent behaviour, or negatively affect co-workers, relatives, friends or strangers. Thus, the impact of the harmful use of alcohol reaches deep into society.

Harmful drinking is a major determinant for neuropsychiatric disorders, such as alcohol use disorders and epilepsy and other noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, cirrhosis of the liver and various cancers. The harmful use of alcohol is also associated with several infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This is because alcohol consumption weakens the immune system and has a negative effect on patients' adherence to antiretroviral treatment.

A significant proportion of the disease burden attributable to harmful drinking arises from unintentional and intentional injuries, including those due to road traffic accidents, violence, and suicides. Fatal injuries attributable to alcohol consumption tend to occur in relatively younger age groups.

Who is at risk for harmful use of alcohol?

The degree of risk for harmful use of alcohol varies with age, sex and other biological characteristics of the consumer. In addition the level of exposure to alcoholic beverages and the setting and context in which the drinking takes place also play a role. For example, alcohol is the world's third largest risk factor for disease burden; it is the leading risk factor in the Western Pacific and the Americas and the second largest in Europe. Furthermore, 320 000 young people between the age of 15 and 29 die from alcohol-related causes, resulting in 9% of all deaths in that age group. Alcohol consumption by an expectant mother may cause fetal alcohol syndrome and pre-term birth complications, which are detrimental to the health and development of neonates.

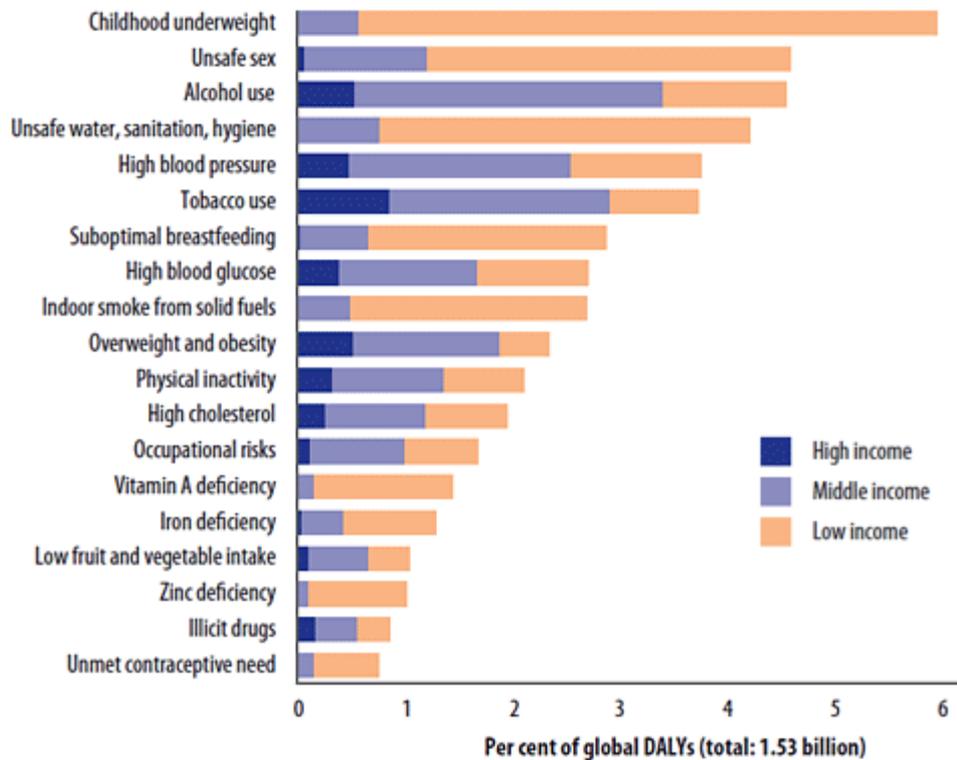


Figure: Global percentages of DALYs¹ attributed to 19 leading risk factors by income group. Source: Global Health Risks (2009)

The impact of alcohol consumption on disease and injury is largely determined by two separate but related dimensions of drinking:

- the total volume of alcohol consumed, and
- the pattern of drinking.

A broad range of alcohol consumption patterns, from occasional hazardous drinking to daily heavy drinking, creates significant public health and safety problems in nearly all countries. One of the key characteristics of the hazardous pattern of drinking is the presence of heavy drinking occasions, defined as consumptions of 60 or more grams of pure alcohol.