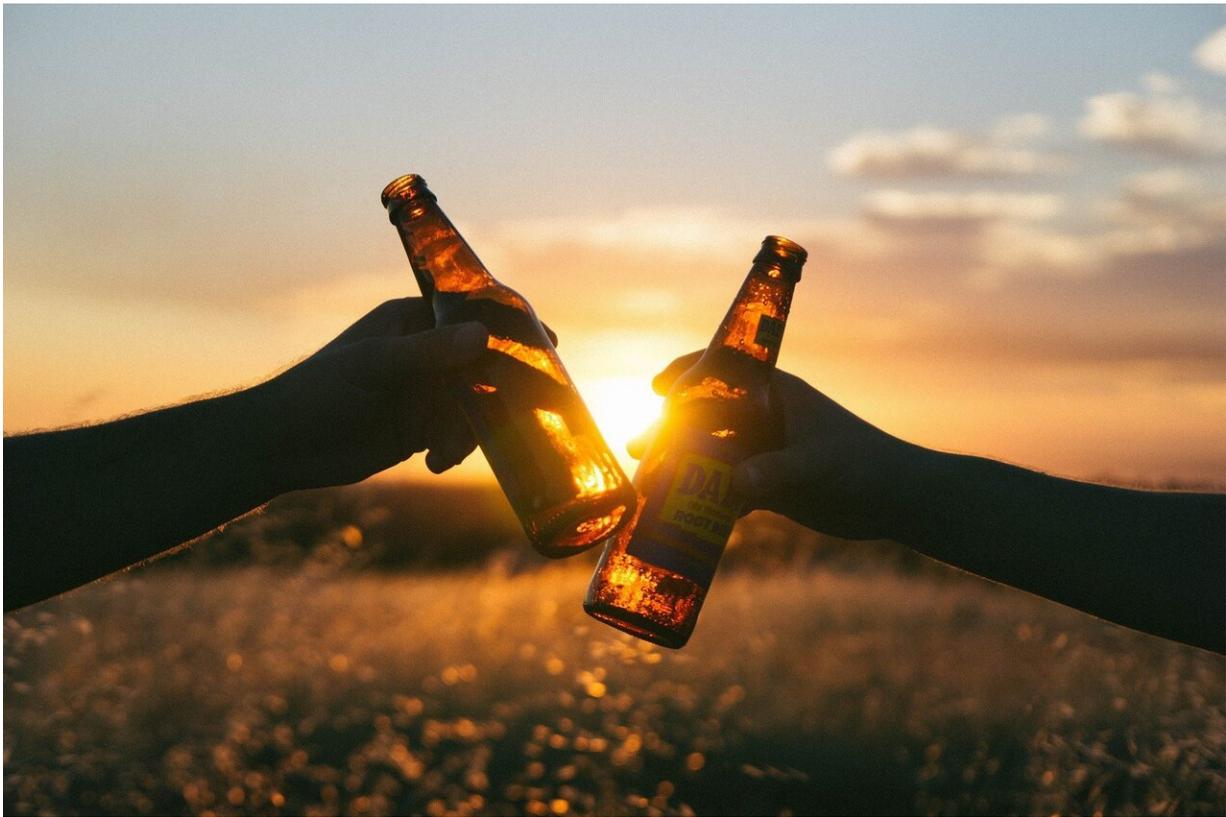


Cancer a compelling reason to cut alcohol, and drink counting helps

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A [new study](#) comparing different ways of encouraging people to reduce their alcohol intake has found telling people alcohol causes cancer makes them want to drink less, and encouraging them to count their drinks

helps them do it.

Lead author Professor Simone Pettigrew from The George Institute for Global Health said that harmful [alcohol](#) use in Australia is a major health issue—it is associated with increased risk of injury, [chronic diseases](#) including alcohol-related cancers, and premature death. And it's not just [heavy drinkers](#)—even moderate drinkers are at increased risk of several types of cancer.

"There are [limited resources](#) available for alcohol harm-reduction campaigns, so it's important to find out which messages resonate best to ensure they have the best chance of working," she said.

"Many people don't know that alcohol is a carcinogen—it's important information that drinkers should have access to. But telling people alcohol causes cancer is just part of the solution—we also need to give them ways to take action to reduce their risk."

In this randomized trial, 8,000 adults who broadly represented the Australian drinking public completed a series of three online surveys over a period of six weeks.

As part of these surveys, some participants saw the Western Australian Government's Spread advert which informs drinkers that alcohol use increases their risk of cancer, some saw simple messages about how to change their drinking habits, and others saw combinations of the Spread ad and the simple messages.

The effect of these combinations on drinkers' attempts to reduce their intake and the actual amount of alcohol consumed were then measured.

"We found that pairing information about alcohol and [cancer](#) with a particular practical action—counting their drinks—resulted in drinkers

reducing the amount of alcohol they consumed," said Prof Pettigrew.

With alcohol consumption accounting for around seven percent of early deaths, the World Health Organization recommended in 2018 that Member States should aim for a reduction of harmful alcohol use by at least ten percent by 2025.

An estimated one in six Australians consumes alcohol at levels that put them at risk of a related disease or injury during their lifetime, and one in four at levels placing them at risk of harm on a single occasion at least monthly.

"Although per capita alcohol consumption appears to be decreasing over time in Australia, at 9.5 litres of pure alcohol per person per year it remains too high. Drinkers need help to understand their risk and take action," said Prof Pettigrew.

"These findings provide new evidence to support investment in the most effective forms of public education to address alcohol harm across the population," she added.

More information: Simone Pettigrew et al, A randomized controlled trial of the effectiveness of combinations of 'why to reduce' and 'how to reduce' alcohol harm-reduction communications, *Addictive Behaviors* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107004)

Provided by George Institute for Global Health

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