

Alcohol Consumption Increasingly Viewed as Unhealthy in U.S.

Young adults aged 18 to 34 are leading the charge to drink less for better health



BY MEGAN BRENNAN

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Americans increasingly believe drinking in moderation is bad for one's health, although the majority think the best advice for a person who drinks an average amount of alcohol is to reduce how much they consume rather than stop drinking altogether.

Young adults are more likely than middle-aged and older adults to say alcohol presents health risks, and their alcohol consumption has dropped significantly in recent years. When they do drink, young Americans are more likely to have beer or liquor than wine, but wine remains the drink of choice among older adults.

Alcohol Seen as Bad for One's Health; Most Say Drinking Less Is Better

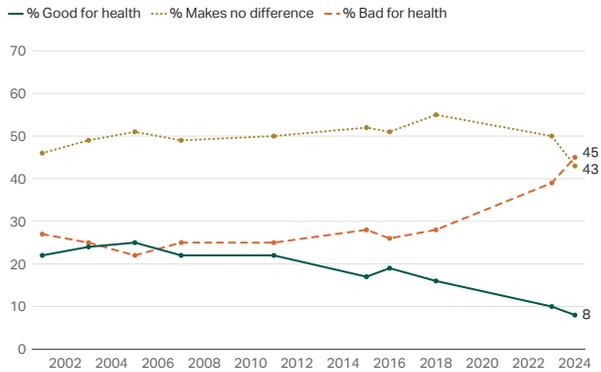
Gallup has measured Americans' views of the health effects of moderate drinking 10 times since 2001. The latest data, from the July 1-21 Consumption Habits poll, show a new high of 45% of Americans say drinking one or two alcoholic beverages per day is bad for one's health. This marks a six-percentage-point increase since last year and a 17-point increase since the prior reading in 2018.

Meanwhile, about as many U.S. adults -- 43% -- do not currently think moderate drinking makes any difference to one's health, while 8% believe it has a positive effect. Both of these readings are the lowest on record.

Between 2001 and 2018, Americans were much more likely to believe moderate drinking does not affect overall health than to say it has a negative or positive effect. Despite a period from the 1990s through the early 2000s when medical research suggested drinking red wine can be beneficial, no more than 25% of U.S. adults have ever seen drinking as good for one's health.

New High in Americans' View of Alcohol Consumption as Bad for Health

Do you, personally, think drinking in moderation -- that is, one or two drinks a day -- [ROTATED: is good for your health, makes no difference or is bad for your health]?



Those with no opinion are not shown.

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Separately, Gallup measures the extent to which Americans think alcohol is harmful to those who drink it, as part of a list of several consumption behaviors. In line with their heightened view that alcohol is bad for one's health, Americans also have become more likely over the past year to say alcohol is harmful to people who consume it.

Currently, almost nine in 10 U.S. adults say alcohol use is "very" (33%) or "somewhat" (53%) harmful to those who drink it. Each reading has edged up three points in the past year. Another 8% now say alcohol is "not too harmful," and 2% think it is "not at all harmful." Those who drink alcohol (21%) are less likely than non-drinkers (51%) to say the substance they use is very harmful. Still, on the whole, Americans view cigarettes, chewing tobacco and e-cigarettes as significantly more harmful than alcohol.

This year, for the first time, Gallup asked Americans their opinion of the best health advice for a person who drinks an average amount of alcohol. A majority of U.S. adults say the best advice for such drinkers is to reduce the amount they drink (55%), while 22% say they should stop drinking alcohol altogether. Just 17% think continuing to drink an average amount is the best advice.

Majority of Americans Think Reducing Alcohol Intake Best for Average Drinker

What do you think the best health advice is for a person who drinks an average amount of alcohol -- stop drinking altogether, reduce the amount of alcohol they drink or not change their drinking habits?



July 1-21, 2024

Answer options were rotated.

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Americans' concerns about alcohol consumption are not tied to an increase in reports of drinking-related problems in families. Rather, the 25% of U.S. adults who now say drinking has ever been a cause of trouble in their family is the lowest since 1996.

Changing views about alcohol are also not the result of a deep knowledge among Americans of recent studies about the long-term health effects of alcohol. Just 19% of U.S. adults say they have heard "a great deal" about such studies, and 30% have heard "a fair amount" -- while 30% say they have heard "not much" and 21% "nothing at all."

Still, those who say they have heard a great deal or fair amount about these studies (51%) are more likely than those with little or no familiarity (40%) to say drinking moderately is bad for one's health. Similarly, those who are more familiar with studies about the long-term health effects of drinking are more likely than those with little or no knowledge to say drinkers should stop drinking altogether (26% vs. 17%, respectively).

Young Adults Most Likely to Favor Drinking Less for Better Health

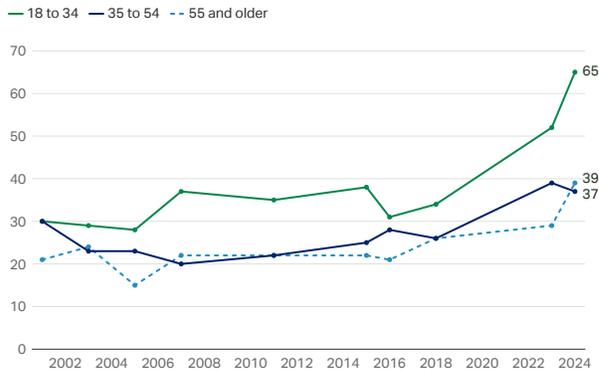
Americans' attitudes about alcohol vary significantly by age, as young adults have become progressively more likely to say drinking is bad for one's health. Whereas 65% of U.S. adults aged 18 to 34 say alcohol consumption negatively affects one's health, 37% of those aged 35 to 54 and 39% of those aged 55 and older agree.

While it is not a new phenomenon that younger people are more likely than those in older age groups to view alcohol as unhealthy, the latest gaps in perceptions are the largest recorded by Gallup.

Young Adults Increasingly Think Alcohol Is Bad for Health

Do you, personally, think drinking in moderation -- that is, one or two drinks a day -- is good for your health, makes no difference or is bad for your health?

% Bad for your health



Those who said it is good for your health or makes no difference are not shown. Answer options were rotated.

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Pluralities of both middle-aged and older adults (49% among each group) think alcohol consumption does not make a difference to one's health, while about one in 10 in both groups think it has positive health effects.

Although most Americans in each age group would advise the average drinker to reduce or stop their alcohol intake to achieve better health, those aged 18 to 34 are significantly more likely to do so.

Similar percentages of each age group, between 21% and 23%, say stopping drinking is the best advice for a moderate drinker, but two-thirds of young adults versus about half of middle-aged and older adults recommend a reduction in consumption. That leaves about half as many young adults (10%) as middle-aged (21%) and older adults (19%) saying the best health advice for the average drinker is to not change their drinking habits.

Young Adults Are Most Likely to Believe Drinking Less Is Healthier

What do you think the best health advice is for a person who drinks an average amount of alcohol -- stop drinking altogether, reduce the amount of alcohol they drink or not change their drinking habits?

	% Stop drinking	% Reduce the amount of alcohol	% Not change drinking habits	% No opinion
18 to 34	23	67		10
35 to 54	23	51	21	5
55 and older	21	52	19	8

July 1-21, 2024

Answer options were rotated.

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Alcohol Consumption in U.S. Relatively Steady

About six in 10 U.S. adults, 58%, now say they have occasion to drink alcoholic beverages, slightly below the historical trend of 63% in Gallup polls dating back to 1939. Among those who do drink alcohol, 61% report having done so within the past week, including 28% who say it was in the past 24 hours and 33% two to seven days ago. Another 38% say their last drink was more than a week ago.

On average, U.S. drinkers report that they had four drinks in the past week, which matches the trend average since 1996. Just 16% of those who do imbibe say they sometimes overindulge on alcohol, the fifth consecutive reading this figure has been below 20% and the lowest in Gallup's trend by one point. From 1978 through 2010, more than 20% of Americans, reaching as high as 35% in 1989, reported sometimes drinking more than they should.

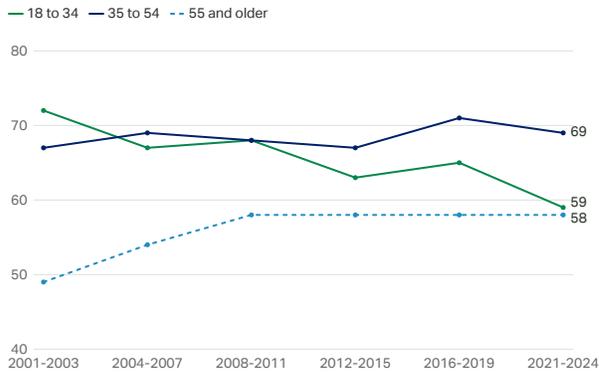
Young Adults Are Imbibing Less Than in the Past

Young adults' self-reported alcohol consumption has recently been trending downward, which is a marked change from the early 2000s when drinking among young adults was at its peak. Aggregated data over six time periods since 2001 show that drinking among adults aged 55 and older is now similar to 18- to 34-year-olds; however, far more middle-aged adults report imbibing.

Young Adults' Alcohol Consumption Has Decreased

Do you have occasion to use alcoholic beverages such as liquor, wine or beer, or are you a total abstainer?

% Yes, consume alcohol



The question was not asked in 2020.

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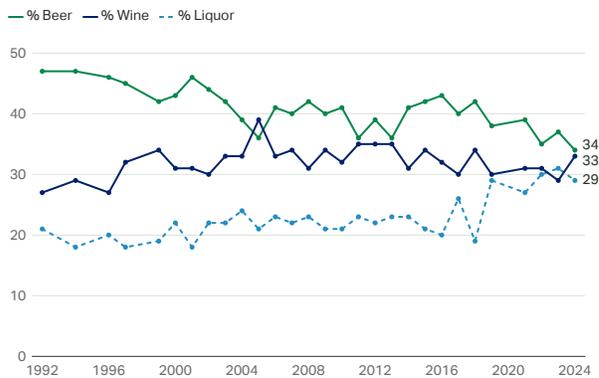
Record Low Say Beer Is Their Alcoholic Beverage of Choice

For more than three decades, Gallup has tracked the type of alcohol that drinkers in the U.S. choose most often, and while it has varied somewhat, beer has typically outpaced liquor and wine. In the latest reading, beer (34%) essentially ties wine (33%) as the top choice, and liquor (29%) is close behind.

This is the lowest reading for beer by one point, which was as high as 47% in the early 1990s and has averaged 41% since 1992. Meanwhile, wine drinking is on par with the trend average of 32%, and liquor consumption is well above its 23% average over the same period.

U.S. Drinkers' Preferred Alcoholic Beverage, 1992-2024

Do you most often drink liquor, wine or beer?



Based on U.S. adults who say they drink alcoholic beverages

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Drinkers' beverage of choice varies based on their gender, age, education and income level.

- Beer is more popular with men, young adults, those without a college degree and those with an annual household income under \$100,000, compared with their counterparts.
- Wine is favored more by women, older drinkers, college graduates and higher-income drinkers.
- Liquor is not the top choice of any of these demographic subgroups; however, it is more popular with women than men and with younger and middle-aged drinkers than those who are older.

U.S. Drinkers' Preferred Alcoholic Beverage, by Demographic Subgroup

Do you most often drink liquor, wine or beer?

	% Beer	% Wine	% Liquor
Gender			
Men	54	16	26
Women	17	47	33
Age			
18 to 34	42	20	36
35 to 54	35	30	33
55 and older	33	38	24
Education			
Not college graduate	41	25	30
College graduate	28	40	30
Annual household income			
Less than \$40,000	40	24	33
\$40,000 to \$99,999	38	27	32
\$100,000 or more	32	36	29

Based on combined data from 2023 and 2024 of U.S. adults who say they drink alcoholic beverages.

Those who volunteered another response or had no opinion are not shown.

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