

**NGĀ TARUKINO  
ME TE WAIPIRO**

**18+ DRUG AND  
ALCOHOL USE  
AFTER CANCER -  
WHAT YOU NEED TO  
KNOW**



# Alcohol - Waipiro

*'I definitely noticed my tolerance for alcohol wasn't the same after treatment. I had to pace myself and watch how much I was drinking.'*

*Young person*

If you are over 18, it's likely many of your friends will enjoy drinking alcohol. While drinking in moderation can be an enjoyable part of socialising, there are a few things to consider after you finish treatment:

- Your tolerance to alcohol might not be what it was before cancer. If you are planning to drink alcohol, alternate drinking water between drinks, or just start with a couple before having more as you may feel the effects of alcohol more than you used to.
- Medication and alcohol don't always go well together. Check with a healthcare professional about whether alcohol interferes with your medication.
- If you've been warned about drinking alcohol, or you have any issues with your liver function, follow the guidelines.
- If you have mobility challenges, or are a little unsteady on your feet, make sure you are in a safe environment or that you have a friend handy to help you.

**Friendly reminder the age for drinking alcohol in Aotearoa is 18.**

**Tip**

If you do choose to drink alcohol, check in with AYA Key Worker or healthcare team about how it can affect your health after cancer.

*Pai ana te kī atu e kāo.  
It's okay to say no!*

If you find it hard to tell your mates you are not into alcohol, check out our top tips below.

## TIPS TO STAY SOBER

**Clue in a friend or two.** If you tell your best mates before the party that you plan on being sober, you'll be more likely to stick to your word than if you keep it to yourself.

**Plan to be the designated driver** (only if you have a license, of course). That way, you will have an easy, non-negotiable excuse for not drinking, and your mates will owe you one.

**If someone tries to hand you a drink, say you have to be somewhere later.** To them, it will sound like you're saying, "This party might be cool enough for you, but I've got bigger and better places to go."

**Carry around a glass filled with soda or water.** People will assume you're drinking booze, and there's no reason why you have to set the record straight for them.

**If people keep bothering you to take a drink, say you are having enough fun without it.** It will probably make them wonder why they're not secure enough to have fun without being wasted.

**Just say no.** It's your body and your choice. If other people have a problem with it - that's their issue.

**If you are still not comfortable, leave the party.** People who don't know how to party without drinking - and without forcing others to drink - aren't worth partying with.



# Smoking and Vaping

Most of us know that smoking is a bad idea. If you were a smoker before treatment or are thinking of taking it up, remember it is super hard to stop once you have started. Being a smoker affects your health, and is linked to secondary cancers like lung, mouth and throat cancer, **so why risk it?** The risk is especially high for cancer survivors who have had radiotherapy to their chest and lungs.

## WARNING

**Nicotine - the chemical in tobacco and tobacco smoke is super addictive. Some people can get addicted to nicotine after smoking just a few cigarettes.** According to the Smokefree Aotearoa website, nicotine is as addictive as drugs like heroin or cocaine. That is why it can be so hard to stop smoking!



## Vaping - is it safe?

Vaping is a relatively new product, and there is very little research confirming whether it is safe or not. We don't know what the long-term effects of vaping are, but there is increasing evidence linking lung and respiratory disease to vaping, so while vaping is less harmful than smoking, it is unlikely to be totally harm free. We recommend that you **do not vape or smoke**. For more information about how to quit smoking talk to your health care professional or contact **Quitline**.



## Recreation drugs - Tarukino

*I was definitely self-medicating with weed. It helped block out what happened. But after a while it made me feel worse.'*

*Young person*

Marijuana or cannabis is one of the most common recreational drugs used by young people in Aotearoa and due to the fact that it is easily grown, one of the most easily accessible. Smoking marijuana increases the risk of secondary cancers like lung cancer later in life. If you are already struggling with post treatment fatigue or cognitive challenges like poor concentration or memory loss, marijuana is definitely going to make this worse.

## Medicinal Cannabis

In 2000 The Medicinal Cannabis Scheme allowed access to medicinal cannabis for health reasons but there's strict criteria around this. Medicinal cannabis is only available on prescription and is only used to treat certain conditions. If you want more information about medicinal cannabis, please consult with your healthcare team for advice. **We do not recommend self-medicating with marijuana and encourage you to speak to a health professional.**

## What are illicit drugs?

Illicit drugs include: stimulants, hallucinogens, ecstasy, sedatives, opiates, inhalants, and un-prescribed steroids. These drugs are not recommended as they are illegal, unpredictable and can increase your likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour. For honest information about drugs, check out the following NZ website aimed specifically at young people: [www.thelevel.org.nz](http://www.thelevel.org.nz).

## When to seek help

It's common for young people to experiment with drugs and alcohol for some of the reasons below:

- **Your mates do it** - it's pretty common to socialise with drugs or alcohol.
- **It's normalised in the media** - TV, movies and social media often portray drug use.
- **Escapism** - a chance to get away from your current situation.
- **Self-medication** - for pain or feeling low.
- **Boredom** - something to do.
- **Instant gratification** - it makes you feel better straight away.
- **Lack of confidence** - to help social anxiety or to help you fit in.
- **Relaxation** - some drugs help you feel more relaxed.
- **Misinformation** - mates told you it wasn't harmful.

If you find yourself turning to drugs and alcohol to help with any pain or stress you are experiencing since finishing treatment, or for any of the reasons listed, check in with yourself. It can be easy to turn to substances to help you cope, but ultimately, the

feelings aren't going to go away. Seeking support is a much better way to support your wellbeing. If you are in any physical pain, let someone in your healthcare team know. There may be other pain management options to help you. Remember to check out the wellbeing tips in this resource. Being active, or reaching personal goals are great ways to help improve your mood, and enjoy time with others without the use of substances.



### Ask for support

If you think you need support to minimise or stop using drugs or alcohol, speak to your healthcare team. You can also find more information or support on the following websites:

- [www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz](http://www.alcoholdrughelp.org.nz). If you are concerned about your drug or alcohol use call the free, 24 hour helpline on: **0800 787 797** or text **8681**.
- [www.quit.org.nz](http://www.quit.org.nz). Quit advisors work with people to make a plan to stop smoking. They offer 24/7 support by phone, text, or online. Call Quitline free on **0800 778 778**, text **4006** or visit [www.quit.org.nz](http://www.quit.org.nz) to register for free help. They also provide good info about how to quit vaping.
- [www.thelevel.org.nz](http://www.thelevel.org.nz) Run by the NZ Drug Foundation, this website is a space for people who use alcohol and other drugs, their friends and whānau. The website offers practical ways to begin to make changes.

Self Check In	Yes / No
I have been made aware of any risks of taking drugs or drinking alcohol alongside my medication/medical history	
I would like support with alternative strategies to drug and alcohol use	
I would like support with quitting smoking/vaping	
I have looked up the recommended websites for more information	

**Notes**