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Press Statement

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CAP: Abstain from alcoholic drinks

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) calls on consumers to abstain from alcoholic drinks. Abstaining from alcohol is a powerful choice for an individual's health, family wellbeing, and social responsibility.

According to Professor Timothy Naimi, Director of the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, Division of Medical Sciences, University of Victoria, his research has revealed a steep increase in liver disease in recent years due to alcohol consumption. There is growing evidence of the health harms of alcohol, including from drinking levels that were previously considered "moderate." These findings make a persuasive case for viewing alcohol consumption from a public health perspective.

The liver plays a crucial role in metabolism and food storage, produces proteins that aid blood clotting, and supports the immune system. At the cellular level, alcohol is a toxic substance that is metabolised primarily in the liver. When the amount of alcohol consumed is excessive, liver cells become inflamed and damaged — a condition known as hepatitis. Over time, inflamed or damaged cells are replaced by fibrosis, where normal liver tissue is substituted with scar tissue, leading to cirrhosis, or severe scarring and liver dysfunction. Cirrhosis can be fatal on its own and may also lead to liver cancer.

Alcohol-related liver disease does not only affect heavy drinkers. A growing body of evidence suggests that chronic alcohol use at lower levels may also impair liver function and cause disease, particularly among individuals with other risk factors for liver conditions.

Patterns of alcohol consumption are equally significant, even among those who may not consume large amounts overall. For instance, binge drinking — defined as five or more drinks for men or four or more drinks for women on a single occasion — is particularly harmful to the liver because it results in very high blood alcohol concentrations.

Moreover, the World Health Organization (WHO) has stated that "[no level of alcohol consumption is safe](#) for our health". Alcohol consumption is associated with increased risks of cancer and other health conditions. The UN health agency classifies alcohol as a toxic, psychoactive, and dependence-producing substance, as well as a Group 1 carcinogen, causally linked to seven types of cancer, including bowel, oesophageal, liver, colorectal, and breast cancers.

In addition to cancer, consuming high volumes of alcohol may increase the risk of non-communicable diseases such as coronary heart disease and unintentional or intentional injuries. Alcohol also causes harm to developing foetuses and contributes to psychiatric morbidity, including depression, anxiety, and suicide.

According to a WHO statement published in *The Lancet Public Health*, alcohol consumption is associated with 740,000 new cancer cases globally each year. It concluded that no safe level of alcohol consumption can be established for cancer prevention or overall health. Alcohol use remains among the leading risk factors for premature mortality and disability due to its causal link to multiple health conditions.

The WHO further notes that there is no evidence of a specific threshold at which the carcinogenic effects of alcohol begin to manifest in the human body. The risk of developing alcohol-related diseases is highest among those who consume large quantities in a short period. Excessive alcohol consumption can cause permanent liver damage and increase cancer risk.

According to the 2023 National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS), more than 45 percent of alcohol drinkers in Malaysia engage in binge drinking. The survey reported that 45.1 percent of current drinkers in Malaysia binge drink — a worrying trend in national drinking patterns.

In view of the health hazards and social consequences associated with alcohol, CAP calls on consumers to abstain from alcoholic drinks.

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