Alcohol use—whether light, moderate, or heavy—is linked with increasing the risk of several leading cancers, including those of the breast, colon, esophagus, and head and neck, according to evidence gathered by the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO). In a statement released today identifying alcohol as a definite risk factor for cancer, ASCO cites between 5-6% of new cancers and cancer deaths globally as directly attributable to alcohol. This is particularly concerning since 70% of Americans do not recognize drinking alcohol as a risk factor for cancer, according to the National Cancer Opinion Survey, conducted by ASCO earlier this year.

“People typically don’t associate drinking beer, wine, and hard liquor with increasing their risk of developing cancer in their lifetimes,” said ASCO President Bruce Johnson, MD, FASCO. “However, the link between increased alcohol consumption and cancer has been firmly established and gives the medical community guidance on how to help their patients reduce their risk of cancer.”

ASCO’s National Cancer Opinion Survey, the results of which were released Oct. 24, found that only 38% of Americans were limiting their alcohol intake as a way to reduce their risk for cancer. The national study on Americans’ attitudes about cancer, commissioned by ASCO and released Oct. 24, was scientifically conducted online by Harris Poll from July 10-18, 2017, among 4,016 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. It is believed to accurately represent the broader population of the U.S.
In addition to raising awareness of the established link between alcohol and cancer—and thereby the opportunity to reduce cancer risk by limiting how much alcohol is consumed—the statement, published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, also offers some evidence-based policy recommendations to reduce excessive alcohol consumption:

- Provide alcohol screening and brief interventions in clinical settings
- Regulate alcohol outlet density
- Increase alcohol taxes and prices
- Maintain limits on days and hours of sale
- Enhance enforcement of laws prohibiting sales to minors
- Restrict youth exposure to advertising of alcoholic beverages
- Resist further privatization of retail alcohol sales in communities with current government control
- Include alcohol control strategies in comprehensive cancer control plans
- Support efforts to eliminate the use of “pinkwashing” to market alcoholic beverages. (i.e., discouraging alcoholic beverage companies from exploiting the color pink or pink ribbons to show a commitment to finding a cure for breast cancer given the evidence that alcohol consumption is linked to an increased risk of breast cancer).

“ASCO joins a growing number of cancer care and public health organizations in recognizing that even moderate alcohol use can cause cancer,” said Noelle K. LoConte, MD, lead author of the statement and an associate professor of medicine at the University of Wisconsin. “Therefore, limiting alcohol intake is a means to prevent cancer. “The good news is that, just like people wear sunscreen to limit their risk of skin cancer, limiting alcohol intake is one more thing people can do to reduce their overall risk of developing cancer.”

Not only does excessive alcohol consumption cause cancer, but it also can delay or negatively impact cancer treatment. Oncologists are uniquely positioned to identify strategies to help their patients reduce their alcohol use; address racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual orientation disparities that may place these populations at increased cancer risk; and serve as community advisors and leaders to raise the awareness of alcohol as a cancer risk behavior.

More information about alcohol as a risk factor for cancer can be found on ASCO’s patient information website, Cancer.Net, on the Alcohol” page of the “Prevention and Healthy Living” section. Additionally, listen to a Cancer.Net podcast about this statement by lead author Noelle LoConte, MD, in which she discusses the relationship between alcohol use and cancer and explains why ASCO released a statement on this topic.

About ASCO:

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology, Inc. (ASCO®) is committed to making a world of difference in cancer care. As the world’s leading organization of its kind, ASCO
represents more than 40,000 oncology professionals who care for people living with cancer. Through research, education, and promotion of the highest-quality patient care, ASCO works to conquer cancer and create a world where cancer is prevented or cured, and every survivor is healthy. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation. Learn more at www.ASCO.org, explore patient education resources at www.Cancer.Net, and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube.