

## Moderate Alcohol

Fewer Americans consume alcohol today than they did 50 to 100 years ago. In 2002 fifty-five percent of U.S. adults were current drinkers, and forty-five percent did not drink alcohol at all. If you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, you should do so sensibly and in moderation.

### WHAT IS MODERATE DRINKING?

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, moderate drinking means up to one drink a day for women and up to two drinks for men. For most adults, this amount causes few, if any problems.

**Differences for Men and Women:** Why are men allowed two drinks a day and women only one? Women become more impaired than men do after drinking the same amount of alcohol. There is a difference in men's and women's weight and size, as well as how their bodies process alcohol.

Alcohol is carried in the body's fluids rather than in body fat. Women's bodies contain less water than men's bodies, which causes the same amount of alcohol to be more concentrated in the bloodstreams of women.

The enzyme that helps metabolize alcohol is less active in women. In addition, medical problems from alcohol dependence (e.g. brain, heart and liver damage) progress faster in women than in men.

### WHAT'S IN A SERVING OF ALCOHOL?

**Standard Serving Sizes:** Most adults do not know that these standard servings of alcoholic beverages all contain the same amount of alcohol: 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or a mixed drink made with 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

Distilled spirits, which are first fermented and then distilled, include whisky, vodka, rum, bourbon, gin, brandy, and liqueurs.

**Calories:** How many calories do you consume from alcoholic beverages? There is little leeway for consuming alcoholic beverages at most calorie levels, because they are low in nutritional value and can be high in calories.

Alcohol has 7 calories (energy) per gram, compared to 4 calories per gram of protein and carbohydrate, and 9 calories per gram of fat. A drink made with one ounce of vodka (40% to 50% alcohol) contains about 14 grams of alcohol and almost 100 calories. (7 calories per gram x 14 grams of alcohol = 98 calories in a drink containing one ounce of vodka)

What Counts As One Drink?		
Beverage	Amount	Calories
Beer (regular)	12 fl. oz.	144
Beer (light)	12 fl. oz.	108
White Wine	5 fl. oz.	100
Red Wine	5 fl. oz.	105
Sweet Dessert Wine	3 fl. oz.	141
80 Proof Distilled Spirits (gin, rum, vodka, whiskey)	1½ fl. oz.	96

Source: Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Nutrient Database for Standard Reference (SR), Release 17.

The total calories and alcohol content vary depending on the brand of the beverage. A beverage with higher alcohol content, including higher proof or a higher percent alcohol, contains more calories as well.

Adding mixers to an alcoholic beverage can contribute calories in addition to the calories from the alcohol itself. Mixers include soft drinks, tonic water, fruit juice or cream.

## HEALTH AND DRINKING ALCOHOL

Certain factors determine whether drinking alcohol is beneficial or harmful: the amount consumed, age and other characteristics of the person consuming the alcohol, and other specifics of the situation.

**Beneficial Effects:** When consumed in moderation, alcohol may have beneficial effects. Moderation is considered as up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. This means the number of drinks consumed on any single day, not an average over several days.

Example: Middle-aged and older adults who drink one to two alcoholic beverages a day are less likely to die from one form of heart disease than non-drinkers or heavy drinkers. These small amounts of alcohol are believed to help protect against heart disease by changing the blood's chemistry. This reduces the risk of blood clots in the heart's arteries.

If you are a nondrinker, however, do not start drinking solely to benefit your heart. You can guard against heart disease by exercising and eating foods that are low in fat.

No one should begin drinking or drink more frequently on the basis of health considerations. Instead, eat a healthful diet, get plenty of physical activity, maintain a healthy weight and do not smoke, if you want to reduce your risk of developing chronic disease.

**Harmful Effects:** Young adults benefit little, if any, from having one to two drinks daily. In fact, drinking puts them more at risk of traumatic injury and death.

Women who have one drink per day appear to have a slightly higher risk of breast cancer than women who do not drink.

The physical changes associated with aging can make older people feel "high" even after drinking only small amounts of alcohol. Alcohol can make high blood pressure, ulcers, and other common medical conditions of the elderly more serious, also.

Alcoholic beverages are harmful when consumed in excess. Generally, anything more than moderate drinking can be harmful to your health. Heavy drinking alters one's judgment and can lead to

dependency or addiction to alcohol. It can cause many other medical problems and actually increase your risk for:

- liver cirrhosis
- inflammation of the pancreas
- hypertension and stroke
- damage to the heart and brain
- cancers of the upper gastrointestinal tract
- violence
- motor vehicle accidents
- other injuries
- suicide
- death

Heavy drinkers may be at risk of malnutrition if alcohol is substituted for nutritious foods. Excessive alcohol consumption makes it hard to get enough essential nutrients while staying within your daily calorie allotment and maintaining a healthy weight.

## WHO SHOULD AVOID ALCOHOL?

Some people, or people in certain situations, shouldn't drink at all. Alcoholic beverages should not be consumed by:

- people who are unable to restrict their alcohol intake. (e.g. recovering alcoholics)
- women of childbearing age who may become pregnant
- pregnant and lactating women.
- children and adolescents
- anyone taking certain over-the-counter or prescription medications that can interact with alcohol
- people with specific medical conditions
- individuals engaging in activities that require attention, skill, or coordination, such as driving or operating machinery

**People Taking Medications:** The effects of alcohol are increased by medicines that depress the central nervous system, including:

- sleeping pills
- some painkillers
- antihistamines
- antidepressants
- anti-anxiety drugs

In addition, medicines for disorders such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease can interact harmfully with alcohol.

### **Pregnant Women and Women Who May**

**Become Pregnant:** Drinking during pregnancy is the leading cause of birth defects in the U.S. If the mother drinks alcohol, the baby can be born mentally retarded or with learning and behavioral problems that last a lifetime. Alcohol-related birth defects are 100% preventable, simply by not drinking alcohol. Therefore, *women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant should not drink alcohol at all.*

Exactly how much alcohol it takes to cause harmful effects on the baby is unknown. Even moderate drinking during pregnancy may cause the baby to have behavioral or developmental problems. Heavy drinking during pregnancy can produce mental retardation, malformation and numerous behavioral and psychosocial problems in the baby.

**Allergy Sufferers:** If you suffer from allergies, sulfites in wine may produce unwanted allergy symptoms by triggering histamine production.

**Resources:** If you have questions or concern about potential risks and benefits of drinking alcohol, talk to your doctor or healthcare provider.

Another excellent source of information on the effects of alcohol on your health is The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism of the National Institutes of Health (NIAAA). Visit their website: <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/>.

### **ALCOHOL AND COOKING**

Wine, beer, and distilled spirits can add flavor, tenderness, and texture to the foods you prepare. Some of the alcohol burns off or evaporates during cooking. A flamed dish (flambé), for example, retains up to 75% of its alcohol content. On the other hand, only 35% of the alcohol remains in food that has been baked for 30 minutes. Longer cooking usually reduces the alcohol content further.

The total amount of alcohol left depends on how long the dish was cooked, the preparation method used, and the amount of distilled spirits, wine, or beer used. Since most recipes do not contain much alcohol, the amount remaining should not pose any health concerns.

Regular table wine may be more flavorful than cooking wine, which is usually high in sodium.

**Nonalcoholic Substitutions:** If you want to omit alcohol in a recipe, always replace it with an equal amount of liquid, such as water, broth, apple or white grape juice. Here are some quick, flavorful substitutions for a cup (8 oz.) of wine or spirits:

- $\frac{7}{8}$  cup (7 oz.) chicken broth, vegetable broth or a fruit juice and  $\frac{1}{8}$  cup (1 oz.) lemon juice or vinegar
- an equal amount of nonalcoholic wine
- water and flavored vinegar, such as raspberry or tarragon, to taste
- water and similarly flavored extracts (essences) to taste

### **DRINK RESPONSIBLY**

One out of 13 U.S. adults, or almost 14 million people, abuse alcohol or are alcoholics. Alcohol problems are highest among 18- to 29-year-olds and lowest among adults over 65 years old. Generally more men than women have problems with alcohol.

The decision whether or not to drink is a personal choice, and abstention is an important option. If you choose to drink alcoholic beverages, follow these tips and drink responsibly:

- Satisfy your thirst with a nonalcoholic drink first. This should allow you to sip, not gulp, your alcoholic drinks.
- Never drink on an empty stomach. Food slows the absorption of alcohol.
- Set your drink limit ahead of time, preferably only one drink per day if you're female and two per day if you're male. The body can detoxify only about  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of alcohol per hour, or one standard size serving of beer, wine or distilled spirits.
- Slow your drinking pace at parties. Put your drink down and socialize more.
- If you have more than one drink, enjoy a nonalcoholic drink between to give your body time to process the alcohol.
- Drink "virgin" cocktails, using nonalcoholic mixers without the liquor.
- When making mixed drinks, use a 1-ounce jigger rather than pouring distilled spirits directly from the bottle into the glass.
- Dilute drinks with water, ice, club soda, or juice and sip through a straw.
- If you are the host, don't feel that you must refresh your guests' drinks.

- Order nonalcoholic beer, low-alcohol beer or light wine.
- In addition to wine or beer, have a glass of water with your meal.
- Have bottled water or soft drinks on hand to insure that you have a nonalcoholic option at a sports event or picnic.

Know the law, because it is illegal to purchase alcoholic beverages if you are underage.

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