



ALCOHOL IS A CONCENTRATED SOURCE OF CALORIES, PROVIDING 7 KCAL/GRAM, OR NEARLY 200 CALORIES PER OUNCE.

BUT THE HEADLINES ARE PROMOTING THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF DRINKING. SO WHAT'S THAT ABOUT?

Popular opinion is that alcohol is recommended to reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, but it is not quite the benefit that many people believe. The latest evidence does show that men who consume a light to moderate amount of alcohol have increased HDL levels (the good cholesterol). However, these possible benefits begin only after age 40 for men. If there are HDL level benefits for women, they would begin after menopause. In addition, similar studies have shown increased risks in prostate cancer for men and breast cancer for women even when consuming only a couple drinks each day. Another problem is, that since calorie requirements decrease as people get older, possible nutrient deficiencies and other consequences are possible.

So if you do want to consume alcohol, how do you do it safely and causing the least amount of harm? Studies show that in order to gain the greatest benefits without increased risks of cancer, men should have less than two drinks per day and women should drink less than one drink per day. Even moderate drinking is not recommended for women who are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant, or to people who are under 21. The studies don't indicate that teetotalers should take up drinking, or that infrequent drinkers should start drinking more.

*Pentz, J. Dr. Nutrition for Professionals 8th Edition, MA: LMA Publishing, 2008.
Cotton, R. MA. Lifestyle & Weight Management Consultant Manual, CA: American Council on Exercise, 2005.*

> DO ALCOHOLIC DRINKS HAVE A PLACE IN A HEALTHY EATING PLAN?

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Over the last few years, the health benefits of moderate drinking have been in the headlines. This has caused some confusion for many people. Does alcohol have a place in a healthy eating plan? While one may choose to include a moderate amount of alcohol in their diet, it's important to understand why that might not be such a good idea.

The first thing to remember is that ethanol, the kind of alcohol that we drink, can be tolerated by the body when sufficiently diluted but it is a toxin. But poisoning your body isn't the worst of it since alcohol is a drug that can modify one or more bodily functions and affect the metabolism of nutrients – particularly thiamin, folate and vitamin B12.

Alcohol is processed by the liver at about ½ ounce of alcohol per hour, so negative affects can last for hours depending on how much was consumed. It alters protein metabolism in the liver so a protein deficiency can develop with excessive alcohol consumption. But even without excessive consumption, some proteins

important to the immune system are no longer synthesized, weakening the body's defenses against infection. While the liver is processing alcohol, it is also storing excess fatty acids as triglycerides in other tissues. This can contribute to coronary artery disease and obesity.

Alcohol acts on the central nervous system (CNS) as a depressant, so drinking alcohol impairs performance, increases risk of injury, causes early fatigue and less total work output. Additionally, it is a diuretic, causing the loss of important minerals such as magnesium, potassium, calcium, and zinc. The dehydrating affect of alcohol can potentially hamper the body's ability to regulate internal temperature during exercise, thus decreasing performance. Can a person achieve their weight loss or maintenance goals without giving up their nightly cocktail? Maybe but it will be harder. Alcohol is a concentrated source of calories, providing 7 kcal/gram, or nearly 200 calories per ounce. And that doesn't include mixers that can significantly increase calorie count. For example, a margarita has 600 calories, a martini 250, and a beer 150. It's easy to see how just a few drinks can pack on the pounds.

Alcohol is also nutrient poor so it is easy to add a lot of calories to one's daily intake without adding any nutritive benefits. Since it is displacing nutrients from the diet, particularly on low calorie diets, there is a potential of malnutrition.

Alcohol consumption should not be a regular part of a weight loss diet for another reason. Too often people will fall into old eating patterns or disregard the health goals when that glass of wine or mug of beer lowers their blood sugar and affects the judgment center of their brains.