To Drink or Not To Drink

For some people, an alcoholic drink during the day is relaxing and pleasurable. If you want to make alcohol an occasional part of your weight management plan, it helps to know its limitations.

Alcohol provides calories but no essential nutrients and it often displaces more nutritious foods and beverages. But alcoholic beverages are not 100% alcohol; add the carbohydrates from other ingredients, like sugar in mixed drinks, for example, and the calories can add up quickly. Ounce for ounce, pure alcohol provides more calories than sugar and less than fat. Since alcohol is metabolized in the body similarly to fat, it can be substituted for fat in a meal plan.

The calorie content of an alcoholic drink depends on the proof of alcohol, the type of beverage and the serving size. The proof, or amount of alcohol in liquor, is twice the alcohol content. A bottle labeled “80 proof” means the liquor contains 40% alcohol. The higher the proof, the more alcohol and calories it contains.

Light beer has about 1/3 the calories of regular beer, although the alcohol content is about the same. Dry wine has fewer calories than regular-bodied wine and dessert wine, which has brandy or distilled spirits added to it.

Calorie and Food List(s) for Some Alcoholic Beverages

Beverage	Serving	Calories	Food Lists
Beer, regular	12 oz.	150	1 starch, 1 fat
Beer, light	12 oz.	100	2 fat
Liquor, 80 proof	1.5 oz.	100	2 fat
Wine, dry	5 oz.	100	2 fat
Bloody Mary	5 oz.	115	1 vegetable, 2 fat

Drink in Moderation, If at All

Some research suggests that drinking alcohol in moderation may help lower the risk of heart disease. That means no more than one drink a day for women and two for men. Typical serving sizes of “one drink” are listed in the table above. However, drinking more than this can increase the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, some cancers, damage to organs, birth defects, and accidents.

If you enjoy an occasional drink, try these tips to cut down on alcohol and calories:

Drink with a meal.

This slows the absorption of alcohol and takes the focus off of just drinking. It is best not to drink on an empty stomach.

Alternate alcoholic with nonalcoholic beverages.

You’ll drink less alcohol and give your body time to process the alcohol you’ve already had.

Stretch the alcohol.

Dilute the drink with juice, club soda or ice.

Go light.

Order light beer or light wine, or have a mixed drink with diet soda instead of regular soda.