



Do drinking and weight loss mix?

Question

Dear Alice,

I work out for an hour everyday (aerobic) and eat fairly healthy (vegetarian/well-balanced) with a reasonable goal of losing 10 pounds in the next 4 months to go from 126 to 116 lbs. However, I also enjoy drinking and have, on average, 3 to 4 drinks a day of mostly hard booze. I'm wondering if it is actually possible to lose weight while drinking this much alcohol, or if I'm shooting myself in the foot. Also, for a woman of my size, is it very unhealthy to drink this amount of alcohol?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It sounds like nutrition and fitness are priorities for you and that you're taking steps to keep your body running smoothly. That being said, it also sounds like you're questioning the role alcohol may play in your longer-term goals of losing weight. Whether or not a person can lose weight while consuming alcohol varies, as weight loss isn't always a simple calculation of calories in and calories out. Since weight loss is based on a number of factors, some people may be able to, while others may not. That being said, alcohol does contain calories, so it's good to consider how many calories you're really consuming with three to four alcoholic drinks each day. It's worth noting that the guidelines for moderate drinking for those assigned female at birth is one alcoholic beverage per day, which is approximately 1.5 ounces of hard liquor, five ounces of wine, or twelve ounces for beer. Anything more than this amount in a given time period is considered binge drinking, which is associated with a number of health concerns, as well as weight gain. Knowing a bit more about alcohol's caloric contribution and reflecting on what alcohol use and weight loss (separately and together) means in your life can help you inform decisions around both moving forward. Read on to learn more about the relationship between alcohol and weight loss.

All types of alcohol contain calories and has other effects on your appetite that may interfere with your weight loss efforts. First of all, 1 ounce of hard liquor (e.g., gin, vodka, rum, whiskey, or scotch) contains approximately 64 calories for 80 proof varieties, and 80 calories for those that are 100 proof. The proof refers to the percentage of alcohol in the liquor (80 proof is 40 percent alcohol; 100 proof is 50 percent alcohol). Assuming that you're only consuming one ounce of these beverages, they could be contributing anywhere from 192 to 320 calories to your daily intake. If you're adding a mixer, such as juice, the calories could be even higher, given that per eight oz. cup, orange juice contains 111 calories, regular cola or lemon-lime soda pop has about 100 calories, and regular ginger ale or tonic water has around 80 calories. To get a better sense of how many calories are in your daily libations, check out this alcohol calorie calculator to calculate your totals. While simply counting calories isn't the full story when it comes to weight gain or loss, this can give you an idea of how much you're consuming.

In addition to the calories, drinking alcohol may contribute to weight gain in other ways as well. For example,

alcohol contains ethanol, which your liver easily processes into energy for your body. Your body then uses the energy it consumes from alcohol instead of burning fats and carbohydrates, which is generally what is burned to lose weight. Further, any energy not converted from alcohol may just get turned into fatty deposits, particularly in the abdomen. If the alcohol itself isn't causing the weight gain, it's also possible that when individuals are intoxicated they may feel hungry and be more likely to snack on foods that are higher in calories.

Another factor to consider when looking at the relationship between alcohol and weight loss is thermogenesis, or your body's natural heating process. Some research has demonstrated that alcohol may stimulate thermogenesis, allowing calories to burn faster in your body. Of course, not all alcohol is the same. Red wine, for example, has a chemical called resveratrol which helps to burn more fat. Although red wine may be more beneficial than hard liquor for weight loss efforts, any amount of binge drinking may lead to some form of weight gain.

Besides adding calories without much nutritional benefit, consuming more than the recommended limit of alcohol may affect your health in the long run. Liver diseases such as alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis, heart disease, cancer, and brain damage are associated with alcohol misuse. Further, those who drink a large amount of alcohol in short time periods may be more likely to develop psychological disorders, such as alcohol use disorder (AUD), characterized by an inability to stop or control your alcohol use.

As you navigate your relationship with alcohol and how it fits in with your weight loss goals, there are some questions you may want to reflect on:

- What are your motivations for your weight loss goal? Who or what may be some of the influences in this decision? Are you trying to achieve a certain appearance? Is it for a particular sport? Was it recommended by a health care provider?
- Knowing about your goals for your nutrition and fitness, in what ways do weight loss and alcohol consumption advance or hinder progress towards these goals?
- Knowing more about alcohol and ways in which it may impact your goals (for weight loss or perhaps health in general), how do you feel about your current alcohol use? What influences your decision to drink in the way you do now?
- If making a change in your alcohol use is one you'd like to pursue, what kind of change feels realistic to you?
- A person's environment and social networks can impact alcohol use decisions as well — Do you drink by yourself? Socially with others? Under particular circumstances (e.g., at parties or when stressed)? How will making any changes in how much or when you drink impact these relationships and circumstances? In what ways can you address them if you decide to change how much you drink?
- For your goals around weight loss or alcohol use (or both), what sort of support can you lean on?

Once you start answering some of those questions for yourself, you may have a better idea of next steps to help you on your journey. You may find this looks like reducing your drinking, cutting it out completely, or another way of approaching your nutrition, fitness, and alcohol consumption. You may also find it helpful to talk with professionals such as a dietitian, your health care provider, a health promotion specialist, or a mental health provider to figure out your next steps. They can get you started on a path towards your goals.

For more information about alcohol and its effects, check out the alcohol section of the *Go Ask Alice!* Alcohol and Other Drugs archives.

Health topic
Alcohol & Other Drugs
Alcohol

Source URL: <:///answered-questions/do-drinking-and-weight-loss-mix>

List of links present in page

- <:///answered-questions/do-drinking-and-weight-loss-mix>
- <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/How-much-is-too-much/What-counts-as-a-drink/Whats-A-Standard-Drink.aspx>
- <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/how-much-is-too-much/is-your-drinking-pattern-risky/Drinking-Levels.aspx#:~:text=Binge%20drinking%20is%20a%20pattern%20than%203%20drinks%20for%20women.>
- <https://www.rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov/tools/calculators/calorie-calculator.aspx>
- <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- <:///category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- <:///category/alcohol>
- <:///category/nutrition-physical-activity>
- <:///category/weight-gain-loss>
- <:///node/19625/printable/print>