

Manage Holiday Cheer One Drink at a Time

Moderation is key to enjoying holiday spirits.

At holiday parties this time of year, a festive greeting is often followed by the question, "What would you like to drink?"

If you're choosing an alcoholic drink, there can be as many options as there are foods at the buffet table: cocktails, beer, wine or champagne.

Canadian guidelines for alcohol recommend no more than 10 drinks a week for women, with no more than 2 drinks a day most days. Recommendations for men are no more than 15 drinks a week, with no more than 3 drinks a day most days. Plan non-drinking days every week. On special occasions, consume no more than 3 drinks for women or 4 drinks for men on any single occasion.

The [Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse](#) describes 1 drink as:

- 341 ml (12 oz.) bottle of 5% alcohol content (beer, cider or cooler)
- 142 ml (5 oz.) glass of wine with 12% alcohol content
- 43 ml (1.5 oz.) serving of 40% distilled alcohol content (spirits such as rye, gin and rum)

In addition to having alcohol, holiday drinks can also have a lot of extra calories from sugar or fat. Even within the drinking guidelines above, this can add at least 200 calories per day—about the same as a small meal or snack. Some drinks may also be high in salt. This is something to consider when faced with deciding between all of the tempting seasonal food and drinks.

The bottom line: like other food and beverage decisions you make over the holidays, moderation is key to enjoying holiday spirits. Consider these questions when making your holiday drink choices.

1. What are my options?

Some holiday drinks come with a particularly potent punch. Blended drinks like Bellinis, daiquiris and margaritas have a lot of added sugar. Caesars, margaritas, and other cocktails can have lots of salt. If you enjoy these drinks, consider having one and then switching to a beverage with less sugar or salt, like light beer, or a cocktail made with soda water or sparkling water. You can also switch to a beverage without alcohol. Choose one low in calories, sugar and salt.

2. What's in this drink?

Alcohol drinks are often mixed with sweet and possibly creamy choices. Consider these substitutions:

Instead of this....	Try this....
Regular pop or tonic in highballs	Diet pop or soda water
Cream-based eggnog or other creamy drinks (such as white Russians and paralyzers)	1% or skim milk
Coolers or punch	Spirit mixed with soda water and berries or oranges, or a little 100% fruit juice
Regular beer	Light beer with a wedge of lime or orange
Wine or champagne	Wine spritzer—mix wine with soda

Small substitutions can easily create healthier beverage recipes.

3. What's to eat?

Drinking on an empty stomach makes alcohol take effect quickly. Alcohol also stimulates the appetite, so drinking before eating can make you even hungrier and increase the chance that you're going to overeat.

Eat something before you have a drink to slow alcohol's effects. Choose something with whole grains and protein, like crackers and cheese or a tuna salad pita. If your body is digesting food alongside the alcohol, the alcohol will enter the bloodstream more slowly.

However, you may want to stay away from salty snacks while drinking. Salted nuts, pretzels, chips and other savories can make you feel thirstier and make you want to drink more. If you are enjoying savory foods with your beverage, also drink water or sparkling water to stay hydrated. Add a lemon or lime wedge for an extra thirst quench.

4. How many drinks have I had?

You can curb alcohol's impact by having a non-alcohol beverage after each drink. You could have a non-alcohol option of the same drink, or a calorie-free beverage like soda water or regular water.

Stay healthy and safe this holiday season!

Happy Holidays!

Last Updated: November 2019

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