



Sensible ways to enjoy holiday drinks

Along with all the great foods during the holidays, many of us enjoy various alcoholic beverages. Taken in moderation, alcohol encourages social interaction by relaxing people and reducing their inhibitions. Both of these attributes are conducive to sharing and communicating.

Recent research correlates modest alcohol consumption with some long-term health benefits. However, the possible negative side-effects of drinking too much alcohol during the holidays exists for all who drink. The amount of alcohol a person can drink without negative side effects depends on genetics, gender, weight, age and how often alcohol is regularly consumed. State of health also plays a role.

Understanding how your body handles alcohol can help you make smart decisions about how much to drink and when to drink. If you drink a bit too much, there are some ways to minimize the consequences.

The way the body handles alcohol is fairly simple. About 20 percent of the alcohol consumed can be absorbed directly and rather rapidly through the stomach. This means the effects of alcohol can reach the brain within minutes if consumed on an empty stomach. If the stomach con-

tains food, alcohol is absorbed more slowly.

Most of the alcohol in the stomach flows into the small intestine. Here, alcohol is rapidly absorbed into the blood stream – even before most other nutrients.

The liver is the major organ that breaks down alcohol, but that speed of alcohol breakdown is limited by the amount of certain enzymes. It takes 1 to 1-1/2 hours for the liver to break down half an ounce of pure alcohol, known as ethanol. This is the amount of alcohol in 3 to 5 ounces of wine, 10 ounces of wine cooler, a 12-ounce beer, or 1 to 1-1/2 ounces of hard liquor (rum, whiskey, scotch or vodka) depending on the “proof” of the alcohol. Many mixed drinks contain more than an ounce of ethanol.

Generally if we consume a little alcohol everyday, we will have a greater amount of the enzymes used to break down alcohol than if we drink alcohol than if we drink alcohol only occasionally. When people consume alcohol in quantities greater than their body can readily breakdown, a number of things can happen. Research shows that the negative effects of excessive alcohol are impaired judgment, headaches and hangovers; increased depression; stomach ulcers; damage to the kid-

ney, bladder, prostate gland and pancreas; skin rashes; impaired immune responses; sexual impotence in men; and increased violent deaths – for example car accidents.

Other research shows that there are mental effects of alcohol even 24 hours after consumption. This is one of the reasons pilots are not allowed to drink alcohol within 24 hours of flying. Here are a few tips to limit the negative side effects:

Never drink alcohol on an empty stomach. If possible, eat something before going to a social gathering. That way you are prepared if someone hands you a drink as you walk in the door.

Make sure to sip your drinks slowly and nibble food if possible.

Limit your alcoholic drinks to one drink every 90 minutes. And if possible alternate with non-alcoholic drinks.

If you find that you have consumed a bit too much alcohol, realize that time is the only thing that can help you truly sober-up. Also, it is thought that hangovers are caused by alcohol’s dehydrating effects. So get fluid back into your cells by drinking lots of fluids before going to bed. Orange juice is ideal because it is high in potassium, which helps to draw fluid into cells.

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