



Alcohol adds to holiday weight gain

If you are concerned that the holiday season is setting you up for another New Year's resolution to lose five or 10 pounds, read on. You might be able to avoid making that resolution.

All the high-calorie goodies that appear spontaneously during the holidays are obvious contributors to increased calorie intake. Enjoying them in moderate amounts need not lead to excess calorie intake and weight gain. Research indicates that most people will compensate to some extent by decreasing their intake of calories from other foods. Alcohol, however, is another story.

Question: Do people usually compensate for the calories they consume in alcoholic beverages by eating less?

Answer: Calories from alcoholic drinks tend to sneak past the lips with little notice. Studies have compared food intake after people have had drinks with and without alcohol. These studies consistently report that people eat more calories during an hour or so after moderate alcohol consumption.

This has a "double whammy" effect. Alcoholic drinks are high in calories, and they stimulate eating. With about 7 calories per gram, alcohol contains almost as many

Alcohol calories do add up

Even lower-calorie drinks contain about 100 calories of alcohol. Here is the calorie content of some common alcoholic beverages:

Drink	Calories
Beer (12 ounces)	150
Light beer (12 ounces)	100
Wine (5 ounces)	110
Wine cooler (12 ounces)	220
Sherry (3 ounces)	125
80-proof liquor (1.5 ounces)	100
Martini (2.5 ounces)	155
Eggnog (8 ounces)	50 to 500

calories as fat, which provides about 9 calories per gram.

Q: Are calories from fat stored as body fat?

A: The human body has two choices for handling these calories: It can simply burn them up for energy, or it can convert them to fat and store the fat in the body. Either way, the alcohol can represent plenty of extra calories.

Q: How can someone curb the tendency of alcohol to stimulate calorie intake?

A: The appetite-stimulating effect of alcohol lasts for about one hour after a drink. Plan ahead to eat at least a modest meal before drinking. This will reduce your appetite and slow the rise in blood alcohol levels after a drink. If you are not hungry while drinking, it will make it easier to avoid high-calorie goodies and stick with the lower-calorie snacks or none at all. Also, if you plan ahead not to eat for at least an hour after a drink, you can avoid the appetite-stimulating effect of the alcohol.

Q: If alcohol stimulates the appetite, do people who drink regularly have more body fat?

A: Most studies indicate that body weight tends to be greater in people who drink more alcohol. But this is a generalization that is not clear-cut.

Alcohol abuse can lead to a number of nutrition and health problems. Some people who abuse alcohol are thin, but this is generally due to associated nutritional deficiencies.

Like all drugs, alcohol can have beneficial effects on health when taken in the right dose. But, as the daily dose of alcohol exceeds moderate intake, the risk of many health problems goes up along with the increased intake of calories.

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