

Alcohol and Weight

- People trying to lose weight — or not gain weight — are frequently advised to “lay off the booze.” Although organizations like Weight Watchers offer ways to drink wisely within their plans, alcohol, with seven calories a gram and no compensating nutrients, is commonly thought to derail most efforts at weight control.
- Despite thousands of studies spanning decades, alcohol remains one of the most controversial and confusing topics for people concerned about controlling their weight.
- The most common research finding was that, in men on average, drinking was “not associated” with weight, whereas among women, drinking either did not affect weight or was actually associated with a lower body weight than among nondrinkers.
- Most such studies showed that “frequent light to moderate alcohol intake” — at most two drinks a day for men, one for women — “does not seem to be associated with obesity risk.”
- And in a departure from most of the other findings, some of the research indicated that for adolescents and older adults, alcohol in any amount may “promote overweight and a higher body fat percentage.”
- The conclusion from the most recent such studies: While heavy drinkers risked gaining weight, “light to moderate alcohol intake is not associated with weight gain or changes in waist circumference.”
- However, even a very small weight gain over the course of 10 weeks can add up to a lot of extra pounds in five years unless there is a compensating reduction in food intake or increase in physical activity.
- Unlike protein, fats and carbohydrates, alcohol is a toxic substance that is not stored in the body. Alcohol calories are used for fuel, thus decreasing the body’s use of other sources of calories. That means people who drink must eat less or exercise more to maintain their weight.
- Genetics are also a factor, suggesting that alcohol can be more of a problem among people genetically prone to excessive weight gain. “People who are overweight to begin with are more likely



to gain weight if they increase their alcohol intake,” he said.

- Furthermore, alcohol has a “disinhibiting” effect and can stimulate people to eat more when food is readily available. “The extra calories taken in with alcohol are stored as fat,” he reminded drinkers.
- **Here’s the bottom line: Everyone is different. The studies cited above average the results among groups of people and thus gloss over individual differences. Even when two people start out weighing the same and eat, drink and exercise the same amount, adding alcohol to the mix can have different consequences.**
- **The critical ingredient is self-monitoring: weighing yourself regularly, even daily, at the same time of day and under the same circumstances. If you’re a moderate drinker and find yourself gradually putting on weight, try cutting down on, or cutting out, alcohol for a few months to see if you lose, gain or stay the same.**
- You might also consult a reliable source on the sometimes surprising differences in calorie content among similar alcoholic drinks. The Center for Science in the Public Interest recently published such a list, available at www.nutritionaction.com. Search for “Which alcoholic beverages have the most calories?” While you’ll find no difference in calories between white and red wines, depending on the brand, 12 ounces of beer can range from 55 to 320 calories.

Source: The New York Times, <https://nyti.ms/2mBwHox>; Do We Need to Give Up Alcohol to Lose Weight? Not Necessarily; Personal Health, By JANE E. BRODY, MARCH 13, 2017

The information for the original article came from a review, published in 2015 in Current Obesity Reports, prepared by Gregory Traversy and Jean-Phillipe Chaput of the Healthy Active Living and Obesity Research Group at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario Research Institute in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.