

lori esarey, arnp



alcohol and weight loss

WRITTEN BY LORI ESAREY, ARNP • PHOTO BY JAMES GIBSON

Alcohol has a dramatic negative impact on weight loss. Although a moderate amount of alcohol may have some debatable health benefits, if you are exceeding one drink per day you may be sabotaging your weight-loss plans. When your objective is to lose weight, particularly fat, in an effort to improve your overall health, consider the following:

1. Alcohol increases cravings, stimulates your appetite and lowers your inhibitions and willpower, which can be detrimental to your waistline. Since alcohol calories do not fill you up as much as the same amount of calories from food, you are likely to consume more calories if you are drinking.
2. Alcohol is metabolized differently than other foods and beverages. It cannot be stored so its energy (7 calories/gram) is metabolized and used for energy first. So, rather than processing calories from normal food, your body gets its energy from those alcohol calories. The impact of the alcohol on the human body is different than any other food group. When you have a normal meal your body gets its energy from the calories from the carbs, proteins and fat, which are broken down in the stomach. Conversely, alcohol requires no digestion and diffuses through the stomach quickly, reaching the liver and brain in minutes. Bottom line: Because alcohol calories/energy are more readily available, the body stores the calories you eat and burns the calories you drink. Therefore, you store more fat and give your body no reason to tap into those fat deposits for energy. The alcohol provides the energy. Hence, weight gain.
3. Alcohol is a diuretic that causes water loss and dehydration. Important minerals such as magnesium, potassium, calcium and zinc are depleted as a result. These minerals are essential for muscle function as well as many other chemical reactions in our bodies. In addition, alcohol adds “empty” calories to your diet, meaning that absolutely no nutritional value comes from the calories of alcohol. Therefore, multiple vitamin deficiencies (specifically B vitamins and folate) can ensue, placing you more at risk for premature memory loss, anemia (the feeling of fatigue), muscle wasting and premature aging.
4. Alcohol may help induce sleep but it isn't quality sleep. Poor sleep can slow or stop one's efforts to lose weight as well as lower productivity, attention span, level of daytime energy and ability to exercise.

The bottom line is that moderate drinking can be healthy but not necessarily for everyone. If weight, particularly fat loss, is your goal then consider abstaining from drinking. You may be surprised how much better you feel and look!

Don't worry too much about holiday parties and after-hour socials. Remember, wait to order that drink, eat a healthy meal first, include an extra 30 minutes of exercise to balance your calories and alternate a glass of water between each alcoholic beverage.



Questions or comments for Lori? Please email her at lori@lakehealthyliving.com.