



## Alcohol/weight gain interaction complex

**I've seen conflicting information about how much of an effect drinking alcohol might have on weight gain. Can you explain?**

There's a simple answer, and there's a more complex answer. Let's start with the simple one, and that has to do with calories.

Alcoholic beverages contain empty calories — lots of empty calories. And as a whole, Americans like to consume them. In fact, alcoholic beverages are the fifth-leading contributor to calories in the diet for American adults, according to the 2005-06 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, accounting for an average of 106 calories a day. (They're behind grain-based desserts, such as pies and cake; yeast breads; chicken and mixed chicken dishes; and soft drinks and energy/sports drinks.) So, if you currently drink an average amount of alcohol and you stop, you'll be consuming about 740 fewer calories per week and could expect your weight to gradually drop, or at least not increase as rapidly as before — depending on what else you consume.

However, try coupling that piece of common sense with the findings of a study published in 2010 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. Researchers examined data from 19,220 women who started at normal weight and then 12.9 years later. When the researchers adjusted for age, non-alcohol calorie intake, physical activity and other factors,

they found that those who consumed a light to moderate amount of alcohol (an average of one drink a day or less) gained less weight over the years than those who didn't drink at all. So few women in the study were heavy drinkers (two to three drinks a day or more), researchers hesitated to draw any conclusions about that amount of alcohol on weight.

That finding seems straightforward — except that other research has linked alcohol with at least a short-term stimulation of the appetite, leading people to over-consume when they drink.

One thing is apparent: You've seen conflicting information about alcohol and weight gain because there *is* conflicting information about alcohol and weight gain.

Although heavy alcohol consumption is linked with some pretty nasty diseases (including colon cancer, breast cancer, liver cancer and other liver disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes), moderate alcohol consumption (no more than two drinks a day for men and one for women) is linked with lower risk of stroke, type 2 diabetes and overall mortality.

The bottom line? Alcohol has a high caloric content. For that and other reasons, if you drink, don't overdo it. And be aware that you might be tempted to eat more when you do drink.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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**By Martha Filipic**  
614-292-9833  
[filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu)

**Editor:**  
This column was reviewed by Hugo Melgar-Quinonez, food security specialist for Ohio State University Extension and associate professor in human nutrition for the College of Education and Human Ecology.

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**Communications and  
Technology  
News and Marketing**  
2021 Coffey Road  
Columbus, OH 43210-1044  
614-292-2011

208 Research Services  
Building  
1680 Madison Ave.  
Wooster, OH 44691-4096  
330-263-3780

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TDD No. 800-589-8292 (Ohio only) or 614-292-1868