

Alcohol and Weight Management

This handout explains how alcohol affects your weight management and health, especially after gastric bypass or sleeve surgery. It describes how alcohol is processed in your body, the calories and carbohydrates in different types of alcoholic drinks, and why it's harder for your body to burn fat when you drink.

How does alcohol affect my body?

When managing weight loss and health, it is important to think about the calories in alcohol. Alcohol contains calories, just like food. When you drink alcohol, your body breaks it down, starting in your stomach. An enzyme called *alcohol dehydrogenase* helps with this.

- **After gastric bypass surgery**, your smaller stomach (or “pouch”) does not make this enzyme, so the alcohol goes straight to your blood. This makes you feel drunk quickly, even with a small amount.
- **After gastric sleeve surgery**, your stomach makes much less of this enzyme, which makes you feel drunk faster.

After alcohol is absorbed in the intestine, it travels through your blood to your liver and kidneys. These organs break the alcohol down slowly, which can take hours. The liver burns alcohol first, before burning fat. This leads to fat building up in your body and makes it harder for your body to use insulin.

When you are trying to lose or maintain weight, think about how many calories you're drinking. Alcoholic drinks do not usually have nutrition labels, so it's hard to know how many calories or carbs they have. Many calorie-tracking apps do not add up the calories and carbohydrates (carbs) in alcohol correctly.

Different Types of Alcohol

- **Beer:** This drink is made from grains. It comes in many colors, flavors, and sizes. It usually has the most calories and carbs.
- **Hard Liquor:** Made from grains, fruits, or veggies. Examples include vodka, rum, gin, whiskey, and tequila. Drinks with higher alcohol content (also called proof) have more calories. Adding sweet mixers like juice and soda adds even more calories and carbs.
- **Wine and Champagne:** Made from grapes. These also come in many varieties and sizes. These are often high in calories and carbs.



There are many types of alcohol.



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of this handout.

All alcohol is made from a carbohydrate source, but not all drinks have carbs by the time they are made. See the table below to help you understand and track your calories better.

Type	Standard Serving Size in Ounces (oz)	Calories per Serving	Carbohydrates Grams (g)
Beer (not home brew or microbrew)	12	145	11
Light Beer	12	110	7
Champagne	4	84	1.6
Hard Liquor	1.5 (1 shot)	90	0
Wine	5	125	5

How much alcohol is safe to drink?

It is safest to avoid alcohol completely.

If you choose to drink alcohol after surgery:

- We recommend **no more than 0 to 2 drinks in a year.**
- If you drink more frequently, your risk of liver damage goes up quickly.
- Over time, this can lead to serious problems like scarring of the liver (called *cirrhosis*) and even liver failure.

Avoiding alcohol will also improve your weight loss and maintenance.

Alcohol Addiction

All alcohol is addictive, especially after gastric bypass or gastric sleeve surgery.

If you are struggling with decreasing or stopping alcohol, talk with your care team. There are many resources available, and we are here to support you.



Let us know if you need help to stop drinking alcohol.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

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