

# Booze Busters:

## The 'low-down' on alcohol



Having a few drinks at any time of the year, can be a lot of fun, but it's especially fun during the extended holidays that come with the festive season and new year. Unfortunately, the side-effects of those few drinks the following morning can be less enjoyable! As we approach this busy time of the year, we thought it would be a good idea to review what we know about alcohol, to help you stay on track and out of hangover hell.



of spirits has 96 calories but for most people the calories in the mixers pose a far greater threat to weight and health, than the actual alcohol. Liquid calories are the worst, those found in soft drinks, syrups and large smoothies and juices. They have high fructose levels which burden the liver and they're rapidly absorbed spiking blood sugar levels – excess sugar in the body is dangerous, so it's a priority to get rid of it fast, the easiest and quickest way is to convert it and store it as fat. As a rough guide, soft drinks, tonic water and juice mixers contain approximately 5 teaspoons of sugar and about 100 calories each.

the 'simpler' the drink, the better it is for you. Not only do fancy drinks have more sugar calories, they make you far hungrier later when you have less resistance to your cravings. The sharp spikes in blood sugar levels after drinking sugary mixers and cocktails is always followed by a drop in blood sugars, often below your normal levels, resulting in your body craving more sugar to bring the levels back up. And so the cycle continues.



### WHY IS ALCOHOL FATTENING?

#### 1. Calories

Each gram of alcohol contains 7 calories, compared with

4 calories per gram in proteins and carbohydrates and 9 calories in fat. So, alcohol contains nearly as many calories as fat. But while carbohydrates, proteins and fat provide us with nutritional benefits, alcohol has very little nutritional value, which is why it's sometimes referred to as 'empty calories'. Unfortunately, those calories still get converted into fat and stored in our bodies.

The standard serving



#### 2. Fat burning

What is worse than the high calorie count, is the way that alcohol is processed in your body. The metabolic priority is your body's ability to select what 'priority' it places on processing different food stuffs as they are ingested. Alcohol gets high priority, and your body wants to process it (absorb, metabolise and eliminate it) before anything else. Internally you literally stop what you're doing – such as digesting that pizza you just ate – to get rid of the booze. Any food or sugary mixer gets pushed aside and stored as fat rather than metabolised as normal. And as alcohol impairs your reasoning, it's likely that you'll crave high sugar/fatty foods after consuming a few drinks, making the problem worse. People eat about 20 percent more calories when they drink with a meal.



### SO, IS THERE A GOOD ALCOHOL CHOICE?

● Wood-aged spirits (whiskey, brandy, scotch, cognac) are low calorie and have high levels of antioxidants (also called free radical fighters). In fact, whiskey contains more



#### 3. Not all drinks are created equal

The general mantra is that



ellagic acid, a free radical fighter, than red wine. While free radicals are necessary for energy and healthy immune function, they must be controlled to prevent cell and tissue damage. Free radicals are implicated in over sixty negative health conditions, including heart disease, cancer, macular degeneration, cellular degradation (aging), and numerous inflammatory diseases.

Something in the wood-aging process seems to confer these antioxidant benefits. The jury is out on whether these health benefits are also present in other wood-aged spirits such as rum and tequila. If you can drink these spirits neat or with water and ice rather than a mixer you would be making the wisest choice from a calorie count perspective. And maybe the added water will help combat the inevitable dehydration, when you wake up in the morning feeling like you've swallowed the Sahara desert!

● **Red wine** probably offers the biggest health benefit with the low sugars and additives. It's full of antioxidants, especially resveratrol which is anti-aging and helps combat cancer. Cabernet and Pinot Noir appear to contain the most. As a rule, go for richer, higher quality reds, organic if you can.

Be warned though, a small glass of wine can have the same calories (120) as a slice of cake. Drink two large pub measures (250ml) and you'll be over the recommended daily limit for alcohol consumption and have consumed nearly a fifth of a woman's daily calorie allowance.



● **Gin and vodka** don't offer any benefits alone, but they can be a platform for incorporating healthier mixers. Scientists have accidentally found that adding alcohol to berries enhances the antioxidants by around 30%. Assuming this to be across the board with all fruits, you could boost the anti-oxidant level on your home juicing by adding a dash of gin or vodka to your grated ginger and lime zest and pureed berries. Probably the healthiest drink if you're a vodka fan, is a Bloody Mary which delivers a punch of cancer-protective antioxidants from the tomatoes.

● **White wine and champagne** are not as potent in nutrients as red wine and they don't contain resveratrol, however white wines still contain a healthy dose of antioxidants and you can add sparkling water which helps dilute the alcohol, meaning you can still enjoy the taste without the calories.

● **Light beers** offer a variety of nutrients, most notably B vitamins and contain around 90-100 calories a bottle. This isn't too bad but a number of nasty colourants and flavour enhancers are often added to make up for the reduction in sugar.

● **Regular beer**, a pint of lager can have the same calories as a sausage roll (200) and drinking five pints of lager a week adds up to 44,200kcal over a year – the equivalent of eating 221 doughnuts, a sobering thought. Choose your brew wisely. A pint of premium

lager can contain 330 calories – that's the equivalent of two pork pies. If you want to cut back on calories, order a lager or beer with a lower percentage alcohol. Those few percent make a big difference to your waist and liver health – a pint of Stella (5.5% alcohol) contains 256 calories, compared to 187 in a pint of Carling (4.3% alcohol).

● **Cider** can appear healthy as its made from apples or pears and some contain an impressive number of antioxidants, but they are generally very high in sugar content and therefore calories.

● **Creamy or sweet liqueurs (Amaretto, Grand Marnier, Bailey's)** contain between 15-40 grams of sugar for a small 100ml glass. When you factor in the fat from the cream, it's the equivalent of a chocolate bar.

● **Alcopops**, also known as spirit coolers, are often lower in alcohol ranging from 3-6%. However, they are known as a malt beverage whose flavour is derived primarily by flavourants and they tend to be sickly sweet. Filled with sugar, additives and chemical nasties, these are not only a recipe for a major hangover but can cause all sorts of damage to your body.



#### THE LAST WORD

Although some drinks may be healthier, relative to others, that doesn't mean choose the best one and then go to town! Less drinks, equals less calories, less hangovers, and a reduced risk of long term health problems. However, if you are out 'on the town' in the coming weeks, you'll be able to make healthier and wiser choices that will keep you feel healthier and happier over this festive period.

