

# Alcohol and weight loss

When trying to lose weight people often forget to look at their alcohol intake. Alcohol is linked to obesity, as it contains a high amount of calories and very little other nutrients. This is why alcohol is referred to as having 'empty calories.' It is important to remember that excess alcohol is also linked to liver disease, stroke, high blood pressure and many other health conditions. Alcohol also has a negative impact on emotional and mental health and wellbeing. Therefore drinking sensibly can have a positive effect on both your physical and mental health.

## What are the limits for alcohol?

The HSE recommends the following to be of low risk of developing alcohol related illness:

- For adult men – Less than 17 standard drinks per week.
- For adult women- Less than 11 standard drinks per week.
- Irish guidelines recommend having two alcohol free days a week and not to have more than 5 standard drinks in one sitting.

## What is a standard drink?



Some of the most common alcoholic drinks contain more than one standard drink in a serving. For example

- 1 pint of beer/cider or stout (568mls) contains 2 standard drinks
- 1 Alco pop long neck contains 1.2 standard drinks
- 1 Alco pop large bottle contains 3 standard drinks
- Small glass of wine (100mls) at 12.5% contains 2 standard drinks
- Quarter bottle of wine at 12.5% contains 2 standard drinks
- Full bottle of wine at 12.5% contains 7.5 standard drinks
- Full bottle of strong wine at 14.8% contains 8.3 standard drinks
- Glass of sherry/port, 71mls contains 1.2 standard drinks

### Calories in Alcohol

One standard drink contains 10g of alcohol, which amounts to 70kcal. The majority of alcoholic drinks contain more calories when mixed with sugar, cordials, mixers, cream and fruit juices. For example a spirit, (35.5mls) contains 70kcal however when mixed with orange juice this increases to 142kcal, the same amount of calories found in two digestive biscuits!

Below is a table of the calorie content of some frequently consumed drinks, as well as their calorie equivalent in number of digestive biscuits.

Drink	Kcals	Number of Digestive Biscuits
Pint of Beer (568mls)	187	2.6
Pint of Stout	170	2.4
Red Wine (125mls)	85	1.2
Rose Wine (125mls)	90	1.3
Sweet White Wine (125mls)	120	1.7
Cream Liqueur (50mls)	175	2.5
Cream Liqueur (50mls)	175	2.5

Drink	Kcals	Number of Digestive Biscuits
Spirit (35.5mls) & tonic water (250mls)	153	2.2
Spirit (35.5mls) & slimline tonic (250ml)	70	1
Spirit (35.5mls) & Cola (250ml)	153	2.2
Spirit (35.5mls) & Diet Cola (250ml)	70	1
Spirit (35.5mls) & Orange Juice (250ml)	142	2
Spirit (35.5mls) & Lime Cordial Dash	98	1.4
Spirit (35.5mls) & Energy Drink (250ml)	160	2.3

Making small changes to the type and amount of alcohol you drink, as well as to the mixer you choose, can significantly reduce the number of calories you take on board. This in turn can make a big difference to your waistline.

Some ideas:

- If you have 5 standard drinks of a spirit with cola you will consume 765 kcal or 11 digestive biscuits worth of calories.
- If you have 5 standard drinks of a spirit with diet cola/ mineral you will consume 420 kcal or 5 digestive biscuits worth of calories.
- If every second drink you have is a non alcoholic diet mineral or water, you will consume 140 kcal or 2 digestive biscuits worth of calories (i.e. 2 standard drinks of spirit with diet mineral).
- Check out [drinkaware.ie](http://drinkaware.ie) for more information.

Written and updated by Ingrid Hutchinson, MINDI July 2016. Review date: July 2019

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