

Ingredients, alcohol level figure into drinks' nutrition info

Dear Readers: Last week, Bryce Pugh, a first year Brody medical student with an interest in neurosurgery and passion for brain health talked about alcohol's role in our health. Few drinks carry the FDA Nutrition Facts label making it difficult for consumers to know what if any nutrition benefit their drink provides. Here is what Bryce found out.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans state that consuming a small amount of alcohol may be part of a healthy diet, but no one needs to drink to be healthy.

Alcohol by itself provides "empty" calories and few, if any, nutrients. To make it easier for you to judge the nutritional value of a drink, consumer advocates for years have been asking that the labels on alcoholic beverages include the alcohol content, calories, an ingredient list and allergen labeling.

The Alcohol and Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB), a division of the US Treasury Department, promises to produce a labeling plan later in 2024. For now, the required nutrition-related information is:

1. the percentage of alcohol in the bottle or ABV if it is higher

than 7% or if a beer makes the claim of "light" or "low alcohol," and 2. if substances known to cause sensitivities, like sulfites and synthetic dyes are present.

Remember, while a standard "serving size" is defined as 5 ounces (oz.) of wine, 12 oz. of beer and 1½ oz. of spirits, different ABV percentages change the size of a serving. A beverage that is "5% alcohol by volume" means 5% of the total volume of the liquid is made up of ethanol — the form of alcohol found in beverages. A 12-oz. beer with an ABV of 5% has less than one oz. or approximately 17.7 milliliters (ml) of alcohol.

The usual measurement found on wine and alcohol bottles is in ml. and not in oz. A typical 750-ml bottle of wine has an ABV of 12%, which would be 7 servings. If there was a nutrition facts label on wine bottles, wine with a higher ABV would show more calories and more alcohol for the standard 5 oz. serving.

The current labeling of several types of alcoholic drinks is a bit confusing. You will see another term on liquor bottles: "proof." In the U.S., proof is twice the ABV. So, a whiskey with 40% ABV is 80 proof and is labeled "80/750 ml."

The higher the ABV, the more calories in a drink, most of which are without nutritional value. Some alcoholic beverages may have a little nutritional value but they can't replace the nutrients found in fruits and vegetables.

Drinking red wine, especially



GROUND PICTURE/SHUTTERSTOCK

Beer ranges from light lagers to dark stouts, each with its own taste and calorie count. Beers have between 8 and 15 grams of carbohydrates coming from grains and hops.

dark and dry red wine, is thought to provide health benefits because of its resveratrol and polyphenols or antioxidant content. Even the evidence-based MIND diet to improve brain function and prevent dementia, allows for a daily serving of 5 oz. of 12% wine.

Some studies suggest that wine drinkers have a lower death rate than spirit drinkers. Anthropologists have observed that people who live in "blue zones" — areas of the world where people live longer than average — drink a glass of wine with dinner. Nonetheless, there is still a lot to learn. Experts continue to debate if it is the wine or the alcohol itself that provides health benefits.

For those who don't drink

wine, grape juice and vegetables offer similar antioxidants.

Beer ranges from light lagers to dark stouts, each with its own taste and calorie count. Beers have between 8 and 15 grams of carbohydrates coming from grains and hops. Darker beers have more antioxidants and minerals like magnesium and potassium than lighter brews, but they also have more calories. Light beers have about half the calories of a standard 12 oz. beer. Craft beers are often over 10%, so the "recommended" would be one — not two — per day. Many people think drinking beer leads to a "beer belly" or abdominal obesity. Rather, it is heavy drinking of any alcoholic drink that can lead to obesity.

Spirits like vodka, gin, bourbon and tequila usually have a strong taste and higher alcohol content than beer or wine. A serving is about one shot or 1.5 fluid oz. of 80 proof.

Without nutrition labeling, it is hard to know what mixed drinks provide in terms of calories, added sugars or carbohydrates. In addition to alcohol, mixed drinks often have juice or soda, or other ingredients added. While a typical gin and tonic might have 140 calories, popular ready-to-drink or "canned cocktails" have 230 calories per serving.

While mixed drinks can be attractive for their flavor, people needing to restrict their added sugar or carbohydrate intake need to choose carefully. The "mocktails" dreamed up by bartenders for Dry January or "Unimpaired Dry Bars" can contribute lots of calories, too.

There is a growing market for drinks and foods that may have a small alcohol content. If the hard seltzers, kombucha teas, alcohol-infused foods, and low- and no-alcohol wine and spirits have an FDA Nutrition Facts label, they have little or no alcohol in them.

The bottom line is to know what you are drinking and choose any of your beverages wisely.

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ASK THE DOCTORS

Complicated grief can extend the time it takes to heal from loss

My mother and stepfather were married for 42 years when he passed away suddenly. That was a year ago, and she's still struggling. I talked to my doctor about it, and he said it sounds like "complicated grief." I've never heard of that. What can we do to help her?

Grief is a response to loss that is so profound, it can temporarily disrupt our most basic connections to daily life. Someone who is grieving may find it difficult to perform routine tasks, have trouble sleeping or eating, and may be unable to feel interested or involved in the lives and actions of others.

Sorrow can prevent them from feeling other emotions, such as contentment, happiness, curiosity or joy. Anger may also make a



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baffling, and unwelcome, appearance in their lives.

The rigors of grieving can give way to depression, lead to health problems and even cause changes to cognition.

For most people, the intensity of grief eases. They begin to cope with their loss, resume their lives and even become able to forge new relationships. This typically occurs gradually over a period

of time. And unlike in theories about specific stages of grief, recovery is typically fragmented, uneven and perhaps a bit chaotic.

For some people, though, the emotional distress of grief fails to lessen. And as it persists, it puts the individual at risk of both physical and mental health issues, suicidal thoughts and even premature death. This has led to the term that your doctor used: complicated grief.

Sometimes also referred to as prolonged grief disorder, it was first identified in the early 1990s. It is estimated that up to 10% of people who suffer a loss experience complicated grief. Older adults, like your mother, have been found to have an increased risk of developing this disorder.

Treatment often involves a

multidisciplinary approach. For some, it includes medications to manage depression and anxiety. These can help ease the emotional burden that makes it difficult for the individual to feel a sense of the future.

Complicated grief shares some aspects of post-traumatic stress disorder. This has led to the development of a targeted type of psychotherapy for this disorder. It includes an educational aspect, in which people learn about the signs and symptoms of complicated grief. This helps them to understand what they are experiencing. The therapy also helps people explore the unexpected ways in which grief has manifested in their lives, focuses on coping skills and gives them a safe space in which to express and

explore their feelings. In addition to loss, these often include despair, guilt and hopelessness.

Behavioral therapy often is also part of this treatment approach. So are support groups made up of people who are dealing with similar losses.

When someone is struggling as your mother is, it is important to get a diagnosis. This usually includes a medical history, a physical exam and a mental health evaluation. The results will guide a treatment plan to help your mother regain her equilibrium and move forward with her life.

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Some drinks can help with digestion, ease stomach discomfort after meals

EBONY WILLIAMS
Atlanta Journal-Constitution

After a season of festive parties and holiday feasts, many of us have experienced occasional indigestion, and whether the symptoms are stomach irritation, bloating or gas, it can be a literal pain.

When it comes to avoiding indigestion, experts have two simple pieces of

advice: Don't eat too much and be sure to stay hydrated.

Staying hydrated and drinking water "helps break down the food you eat, allowing its nutrients to be absorbed by your body," explains the Mayo Clinic.

But while drinking plenty of water can aid in digestion and even help keep you from overeating, it doesn't do much to help sooth your

symptoms once you already have indigestion.

Here are five drinks that help with digestion after meals, according to Healthline:

- Herbal and spiced teas like peppermint tea, turmeric tea, ginger tea and fennel tea can reduce inflammation and relieve symptoms of digestive distress.
- Prune juice is full of

fiber and can help you feel fuller longer while helping produce bowel movements.

■ Green juices or smoothies are high in water and fiber and pass gently through the digestive system.

■ Kombucha has many probiotics in it; according to the National Library of Medicine, it may also help with nutrient absorption.

■ Kefir — a fermented milk product — is also filled with probiotics and is fermented, providing an array of nutrients that can help pass bowel movements.

WHAT TO AVOID

When it comes to preventing indigestion, avoiding lying down after a meal, even if it's just a snack. Lying down up to three hours after eating can

lead to indigestion from increased stomach acid.

And while a glass of brandy or whisky may be a traditional after-dinner treat, according to a 2017 study, digesting alcohol after a meal can cause "gut-derived inflammation," damage your digestive tract and have a "negative impact" on gut health.

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