

Nutrition

fact sheet



Distilled spirits are beverage alcohol products that are first fermented and then distilled. There are many types of distilled spirits including whisky, vodka, rum, bourbon, gin, brandy, and liqueurs. Regardless of how they are produced, distilled spirits, beer and wine all contain alcohol.

Adult Beverage Consumption: Making Responsible Drinking Choices

More than 100 million American adults drink beverage alcohol responsibly. For these adults, moderate consumption of beverage alcohol—distilled spirits, beer or wine—can be an acceptable diet and lifestyle choice. Some individuals should not drink alcohol beverages at all, and abstinence is an important option.

Those adults who choose to drink alcohol beverages should do so sensibly and in moderation

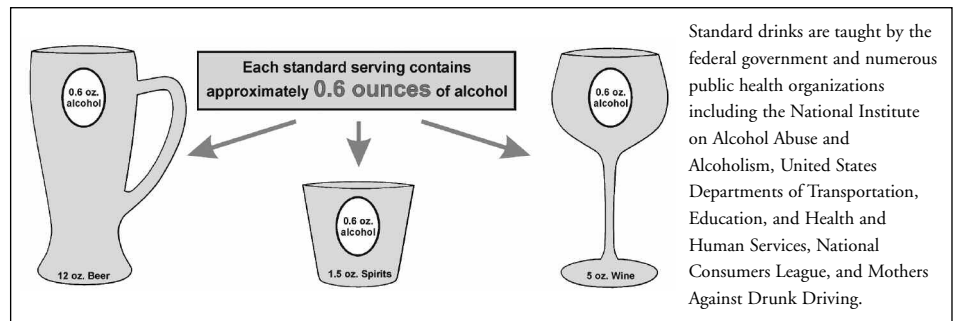
Moderate drinking is defined by the federal government's *2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines) as up to one drink per day for women and up to two drinks per day for men. This limit is based on differences between the sexes in both weight and metabolism. Drinking patterns also

can be as important as the amount. One to two drinks per day does not mean you can drink a “week’s worth” of alcohol over a period of a few hours or a few days. Knowing the facts of what a standard drink is helps guide responsible decisions about drinking. The following count as a drink:

- 12 fluid ounces of regular beer (144 calories)
- 5 fluid ounces of wine (white wine 100 calories, red wine 105 calories)
- 1.5 fluid ounces of 80 proof distilled spirits (96 calories)

Individuals who should not drink at all include:

- Children and adolescents,
- Those who cannot restrict their alcohol intake,
- Women of childbearing age who may become pregnant,



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www.distilledspirits.org

The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) is a national trade association representing producers and marketers of distilled spirits sold in the United States. For copies of scientific articles or the *Educational Tool Kit on Beverage Alcohol Consumption*, go to www.alcoholtoolkit.org. For information on the distillers' efforts to combat alcohol abuse including preventing drunk driving and underage drinking, please contact The Century Council at www.centurycouncil.org.

Additional information is available from: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) at www.niaaa.nih.gov.



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- Pregnant and lactating women,
- Those taking medications that can interact with alcohol or who have specific medical conditions.

Drinking should be avoided by individuals engaging in activities that require attention, skill or coordination, such as driving or operating machinery.

Moderate Drinking and Health

Consumption of alcohol can have beneficial or harmful effects depending on individual factors such as amount consumed, age, and health status, as well as the conditions under which the alcohol is consumed.

According to the *Dietary Guidelines*, "The lowest all-cause mortality occurs at an intake of one to two drinks per day. The lowest coronary heart disease mortality also occurs at an intake of one to two drinks per day. Morbidity and mortality are highest among those drinking large amounts of alcohol."

Current research shows:

- Light to moderate beverage alcohol consumption for some age groups may reduce the risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.
- The reported potential benefits are associated with the ethanol (alcohol) found in *all* beverage alcohol products—distilled spirits, beer or wine. There are also a number of other dietary and lifestyle factors associated with reducing disease.
- Even one drink per day can slightly increase the risk of breast cancer, according to a report from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).
- According to the *Dietary Guidelines* report, moderate drinking does not affect overall diet quality and is not associated with obesity. Some research suggests that alcohol energy

may be used differently than energy from other calories consumed. However, all alcohol drinks contain calories and heavy drinking contributes to weight gain. According to NIAAA's *The Physicians' Guide to Helping Patients With Alcohol Problems*, "Most adults who drink alcohol drink in moderation and are at low risk for developing problems related to their drinking. However, all drinkers, including low-risk drinkers, should be aware of the health risks associated with alcohol consumption. Provide your patients with information and advice about the risks of drinking."

Drink Responsibly

Individuals should not choose to drink alcohol for health reasons. Those adults who choose to drink should do so responsibly at all times, and even less than heavy consumption of alcohol is associated with significant risks. Alcohol abuse can cause serious health and other problems and, as noted in the *Dietary Guidelines*, "[t]he hazards of heavy alcohol consumption are well known..." There is also a body of scientific literature, including the articles cited in this fact sheet, regarding the reported health risks of beverage alcohol consumption generally. Additionally, there are warning labels on all alcohol beverage containers sold in the US. The decision whether or not to drink is a personal choice. For anyone under twenty-one years of age, know the law—it is illegal to purchase beverage alcohol if you are underage. As always, potential risks and benefits of drinking, as well as all other health, diet and lifestyle choices, should be discussed with a registered dietitian and/or physician.