

Alcohol: Know Your Limit and Stick to It



The Effects of Alcohol in Your Blood table on the third page shows approximately how much you have to drink to reach various levels of blood alcohol content (BAC), and what effect alcohol has at those levels.

These are only rough guides, however. How much you drink isn't the only factor that determines how intoxicated you become. Other factors explain why one person seems to be able to "hold their liquor" (or beer or wine) while another can't. How tipsy you get when you drink depends on:

How much you've eaten.

You get drunk faster on an empty stomach; food slows down the body's absorption of alcohol.

How long it takes you to finish a drink.

The body metabolizes alcohol at $\frac{1}{3}$ ounce per hour. This is a little less than the amount in a 12-ounce beer, a 4 to 5 ounce glass of wine, or a mixed drink with $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of 80-proof liquor. So downing two or three drinks in an hour is more intoxicating than sipping those same drinks over the course of an evening.

What you drink.

Generally, the higher the concentration of alcohol, the more quickly alcohol is absorbed. Vodka, for example, is 40 or 50 percent alcohol, so it's absorbed faster than beer, which averages 3.2 to 5 percent alcohol.

Carbonation.

Carbonated drinks like champagne are absorbed faster than noncarbonated drinks, like wine.

Your weight.

Given equal amounts of alcohol consumed in 1 hour, a lighter person will reach a higher blood alcohol level than a heavier person.

Your age.

Given equal amounts of alcohol, older people generally achieve higher blood alcohol levels than younger people.