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THE DRINKING WOMAN'S DIET

Do you want to imbibe without ballooning? Then try our thinking (and drinking) woman's guide to all kinds of alcohol >> by SARA REISTAD-LONG

>> DON'T drink and diet! That's what New York City weight-loss expert Heather Bauer, RD, counseled women when she first set up shop. "After all, alcohol is a bad diet deal: It's caloric without providing much nutritional value in return," explains Bauer, co-author of *Bread Is the Devil*. But then she realized that "for most of my clients, this recommendation turned out to be a deal breaker. If they had to give up drinking, they just wouldn't diet. So I had to figure out a way to help them lose weight while continuing to drink."

For women who've come to rely on a glass of wine or a cocktail to take the edge off their day or to help lubricate social gatherings, doing a Carrie Nation number can seem pretty unappealing. And it is possible to watch your weight without making that sacrifice. "Most

research says that women who drink the recommended amount—one serving a day—tend not to gain weight over time," says Kenneth Mukamal, MD, MPH, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. In fact, a 2010 study of 19,220 women found that over a 13-year period, women whose drinking was light or moderate (i.e., up to two drinks a day) were 30 percent less likely to become obese than nondrinkers.

Still, alcohol isn't a get-out-of-dieting-free card. You can have your alcohol and drink it, too—you just have to be smart about it.

KNOW THINE ENEMY

Alcoholic drinks, notes Bauer, are dieters' favorite example of empty calories. Pure alcohol, aka ethanol, contains seven calories per gram; by comparison, fat has nine calories per gram, and protein and carbohydrates each have four. That means one standard drink—defined in this story as a five-ounce glass of wine, a 1.5-ounce serving of hard liquor or a 12-ounce bottle of light beer—comes in at roughly 100 calories, "about CONTINUED ON PAGE 112

HEALTHIER HOOD
 >> Above, from left: A Prosecco Sparkler, the gin-based Kachumber Kooler and Desert Highway with tequila.

FOOD STYLIST: KAREN EVANS

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the same as an eight-ounce soda," says Marion Nestle, PhD, professor of nutrition, food studies and public health at New York University and a coauthor of *Why Calories Count*. (Regular beer contains about 50 calories more.) And if you add mixers to a cocktail, the alcohol content is the least of your worries. A piña colada, for example, can weigh in with as many as 530 calories—more than either a McDonald's Quarter Pounder with Cheese or a Frappuccino from Starbucks.

Alcohol changes more than your daily calorie total. As a dopamine sensitizer, it spurs your brain to release a cascade of feel-good hormones that can put you in a devil-may-care state of mind that's dangerous when you're standing next to the dessert cart, notes Lauren Slayton, RD, director of Food-trainers, a nutrition-counseling service in New York.

But some women who drink do not pack on the pounds, for various possible reasons. Research suggests that light imbibers tend to compensate, perhaps unconsciously, by cutting down on food calories, especially from sweets, says Mukamal. And for some people, ethanol may, in effect, serve up fewer than seven calories per gram. "People metabolize alcohol differently depending on their genes," explains Mukamal. "Some readily convert alcohol into forms that can be used for energy—this would add cal-

ories that could end up being stored as fat—while in others, more alcohol may be removed from the body in ways that don't provide similar calories."

All bets are off, however, if you have more than one drink a day. "Heavy alcohol use is associated with weight gain over the long haul," says Joan Salge Blake, RD, clinical associate professor at Boston University's Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences. Even worse, there appears to be a tendency for that extra weight to land in your middle. And, in general, the more you drink at one sitting, the bigger your belly gets, Mukamal says. (For tips on lowering your intake, see "Want to Cut Down?" below.)

Do note that any alcohol can adversely affect some women, such as those with a history of substance abuse. And if you are at risk for breast cancer, consult your doctor about your alcohol intake. Drinking regularly will boost your odds of getting this disease by 10 to 15 percent, and the danger increases the more you imbibe, says Mukamal.

Now that you know the facts, the risks and the math, check out this guide for the thinking (and drinking) woman.

1 | RUN THE NUMBERS

If you're on an exchange-based eating plan, the general rule is 2 drinks = 1 carb serving. Loosely translated, this means that if you're having just a single drink,

you can slip under the radar, but if you're doubling up, plan to cut out some bread or dessert. Also, before you buy, check out the proof or alcohol content listed on the bottle. The higher the number, the more calories the bottle contains.

2 | PUT YOUR DRINKS ON A DIET

Liquid calories have derailed many dieters. But if you've been in a liquor store or gourmet shop lately, you may have noticed that the shelves now offer reduced-calorie versions of vodka, premixed cocktails, mixers and agave nectar and other sweeteners. Or prepare waist-friendlier potions on your own; see "Slimmed-Down Sips," page 114.

3 | NIX THE NIGHTCAP

Drinking helps you fall asleep faster, but it disrupts your sleep cycle and promotes sleep apnea—obstructed breathing—especially in the second half of the night, says Steven Y. Park, MD, an otolaryngologist and sleep specialist at Montefiore Medical Center in the Bronx. That sets off a bad cycle: The breathing difficulties cause you to toss and turn, which elevates your stress hormones. These in turn may awaken you and make it hard for you to get back to sleep.

"Research involving adults shows that those who sleep less than eight hours nightly have not only a higher body weight but also higher levels of ghrelin, a hormone that increases hunger, and

» WANT TO CUT DOWN?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for women, drinking in moderation means having no more than one drink a day—health benefits tend to cap off at that point. Here are some ways to painlessly limit your intake.

» **PICK A DRINK** you like but don't love. If you can drink Champagne as if it were fruit juice but find vodka with soda harder to sip, go for the latter. "It's tough to exert willpower when you're enjoying your favorite thing," says

Heather Bauer, RD, who suggests imbibing your third-choice beverage.

» **KEEP YOUR WATER** glass full. "I always aim to drink three full glasses during a meal," says Bauer. This fills your stomach and keeps you hydrated. Also, having a goal you're moving toward (drinking water) rather than away from (drinking alcohol) can seem much more manageable.

» **SCHEDULE A WORKOUT** right before you expect to drink. "Afterward, you want to reach for something refreshing and hydrating, like water or

coconut water—not something dehydrating, like alcohol," says New York City nutrition consultant Stephanie Middleberg, RD.

» **CARRY BREATH STRIPS**. "A minty mouth cuts the craving for just about everything alcoholic, wine in particular," explains Bauer.

» **SWALLOW FISH OIL** supplements. Last spring a study found that taking omega-3 supplements reduced alcohol cravings in mice. Other research suggests this may work in humans, too, says lead author Al-

exander B. Niculescu III, MD, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry and medical neuroscience at Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. He recommends taking four fish oil capsules a day—about 4,000 milligrams total, containing about 1,000 milligrams of DHA.

"But talk to your doctor first," he says. "Fish oil has an effect similar to that of aspirin, so if you have a bleeding problem and/or are on anticoagulants, supplements may prolong bleeding time." —S.R.L.

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lower levels of leptin, a hormone that suppresses hunger in the body, than those who enjoy a longer nightly slumber," says Blake. In other words, using alcohol as a sleep aid only adds to a weight problem. Solution? Three or four hours before bedtime, stop drinking. "Not only will you lose weight more easily, but you'll also sleep better and have more energy during the day," Park explains.

CAN WE FRESHEN YOUR DRINK?

Below, delicious cocktails that clock in at a diet-friendly 216 calories or fewer.

SPIKED LEMON TEA

This drink was concocted by Trace Conway, bartender at New York City's The Red Cat restaurant. With some no-cal ingredients and slimmed-down vodka, it contains 60 fewer calories than a five-ounce Long Island iced tea.

Calories: 107

- 2 sprigs fresh mint
- 1 packet Splenda
- 2 ounces Völí Lyte (reduced-calorie vodka)
- 2½ ounces brewed and chilled tea (we used Darjeeling, but you can use your favorite)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Muddle the mint and Splenda, then add the vodka, tea and lemon juice. Pour over ice in a tumbler.

WEEKEND WITH SOPHIE

Grapefruit has long been thought to help burn excess fat in the body; although that's probably a myth, the fruit does have tons of flavonoids (an antioxidant), as does this drink, from Allison Anderson, bar manager of Frasca Food and Wine in Boulder, Colorado.

Calories: 149

- 1½ ounces grapefruit juice
- 1 ounce Cocchi Americano (an aperitif)
- ½ ounce honey syrup (made with ½ teaspoon each honey and water)
- 1½ ounces botanical-style gin (for instance, Hendrick's)
- Grapefruit twist, for garnish

Combine all ingredients except twist; shake, and serve in a chilled martini glass.

PROSECCO SPARKLER

Diluting the sparkling Italian wine Prosecco with calorie-free soda water takes nothing away from this cocktail, thanks to the herbaceous and citrusy notes in the sugar syrup. This drink, created by New York City nutritionist Marissa Lippert, RD, author of *The Cheater's Diet*, comes in at 33 fewer calories than a six-ounce glass of Prosecco.

Calories: 87

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup mint leaves, loosely packed
- ¾ teaspoon dried lavender
- 3 strips lemon peel, removed with a vegetable peeler
- 4 ounces Prosecco, chilled
- Club soda, chilled
- Lemon twist and mint sprig, for garnish

Make simple syrup: In a small saucepan, bring 1 cup water, the sugar, mint, lavender and lemon peel to a simmer until all the sugar is dissolved. Allow the syrup to cool, then strain through a sieve, discarding the solids. You can refrigerate the syrup for up to two weeks and use in other drinks or desserts. For this drink: Place Prosecco in a wineglass. Add 1½ teaspoons simple syrup. Top off with club soda.

WHAT'S UP, DOC?

Dietary sources seem to work better than supplements at fending off some effects of aging. The carrot juice in this drink, by Kevin Diedrich, bar manager at Jasper's Corner Tap & Kitchen in San Francisco, is a lively way to add to your anti-aging arsenal.

Calories: 132

- 1 ounce Royal Combier
- 2 ounces carrot juice
- 1 ounce ginger beer
- ½ ounce lemon juice
- 2 dashes angostura bitters
- Lemon wheel, for garnish

Combine all ingredients except the lemon wheel; shake, and pour over ice in a rocks glass.

THE NEIL DIAMOND

One of this drink's liqueurs is made from antioxidant-packed açai, and the other from ginger, which has anti-inflammatory properties. The cocktail was created by Mary Edes, beverage director and general manager at Coppa in Boston.

Calories: 211

- 1 ounce Veev açai liqueur
- 1 ounce Domaine de Canton ginger liqueur
- 1 ounce grapefruit juice
- 1 teaspoon blueberry preserves
- 2 mint leaves
- Mint sprig, for garnish

Combine all ingredients except the mint sprig in a shaker with ice. Shake vigorously; serve on the rocks in a short glass.

KACHUMBER KOOLER

For this cocktail, Floyd Cardoz of North End Grill in New York City uses cucumbers, reputed to reduce water

» SLIMMED-DOWN SIPS

Here are more makeovers that keep the calorie side of your cocktails in check, from New York City nutritionist Stephanie Middleberg, RD, and Matt Downes, former chef at Steve's Craft Ice Cream in New York City:

» **WHITE RUSSIAN** Cut fat and preserve flavor

by replacing the cream with sweetened almond milk (3 grams of fat per ¾-cup serving) and a dash of vanilla extract.

» **SCREWDRIIVER** A cup of OJ equals about 110 calories and 22 grams of sugar. The juice of one lemon, by contrast, yields roughly 12 calories and

is so intense in flavor, you don't need very much to make an impact. Dilute the juice with water to fill the glass, then add some stevia to make up for the lost sweetness.

» **PIÑA COLADA** Coconut milk contains about 360 calories (and 32 grams of saturated fat!) per cup.

Make the switch to coconut water (45 calories per cup) and save the caloric equivalent of a slice of pizza.

» **JACK AND COKE** In lieu of Coca-Cola, add seltzer water or lightly sweetened iced tea to Jack Daniel's whiskey. —S.R.L.

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retention, a useful counter to the puffy faces some of us get after drinking.

Calories: 148

- 3 ¼-inch slices English cucumber
- 3 ¼-inch slices slender green chile (for added heat and spice, don't remove the seeds)
- 4 sprigs fresh cilantro
- 1¾ ounces Plymouth Gin
- ½ ounce fresh lime juice
- ½ ounce simple syrup (dissolve 1 cup sugar in 1 cup water)
- Slice of cucumber, mild green pepper cut lengthwise and cilantro sprig, for garnish

In a cocktail shaker, combine the cucumber, chile and cilantro; muddle well. Add ice, the gin, lime juice and syrup, then shake vigorously until shaker is frosted on the outside. Strain mixture into an ice-filled rocks glass.

BIKINI MARTINI

Two ounces of Voli Lyte vodka has 96 calories (versus 128 for standard vodka), slimming down this martini, by mixologist Katie Mulholland of David Burke Kitchen in New York City.

Calories: 173

- 10 blueberries
- 5 mint leaves
- 2 ounces Voli Lyte vodka
- 1 tablespoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon agave syrup
- Club soda

In a cocktail shaker, muddle the blueberries and mint. Add ice, the vodka, lime juice and agave syrup; shake well. Strain into a glass. Top off with club soda.

SPICY GRAPEFRUIT MARGARITA

Instead of sugar, The Red Cat's Conway relies on spicy pepper to mask the bitter taste of tequila, so a little of this drink goes a long way. It also contains 46 fewer calories than a typical frozen margarita.

Calories: 122

- ½ pepper (a habanero if you dare, but a jalapeño or Thai chile would work, too), cut into quarter-inch slices
- 2 cups tequila
- ½ ounce low-calorie triple sec
- 2 ounces fresh grapefruit juice
- Lime wedge, for garnish

Drop the pepper slices into the tequila; leave overnight. Strain, and pour 1½ ounces of the mixture over ice. Stir in the triple sec and juice.

DESERT HIGHWAY

This drink, by Anderson of Frasca Food and Wine, stars hibiscus tea, which has been linked to lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Calories: 216

- 2 ounces cold hibiscus tea (see below)
- 5 raspberries, plus more for garnish
- ¼ teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1½ ounces freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1½ ounces plata tequila (silver tequila)
- 1 ounce light agave syrup

To make the tea: Add either 1 heaping tablespoon dried hibiscus tea leaves or 2 hibiscus tea bags to 16 ounces cold water; steep for 20 minutes. To make the drink: In a cocktail shaker, muddle the raspberries and peppercorns. Add the tea, lime juice, tequila and agave syrup. Shake and strain. Pour over ice in a highball glass.

NOUVEAU BLOODY MARY

This refreshing drink was cocreated by Naren Young, bar manager, and Linden Pride, general manager, of Saxon + Parole in New York City.

Calories: 135

- 1½ ounces Absolut vodka, infused with garlic (see below)
- 5 ounces V8 juice (or make your own with tomatoes, carrots and celery)
- ½ teaspoon tomato paste
- ½ ounce lemon juice
- 4 dashes Worcestershire sauce
- 3 dashes green Tabasco
- 2 dashes red Tabasco
- Good pinch of salt and celery salt
- Grind of black pepper
- ½ teaspoon horseradish

To make the infused vodka: Steep 1 garlic clove in 2 cups vodka overnight. Strain, and pour 1½ ounces of the mixture into a cocktail shaker. Add remaining ingredients; shake very well. Pour into an ice-filled highball glass. ©