

Episode 36 - Alcohol Consumption

The Good, The Bad, and the Bubbly

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with coach T, episode number 36.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey guys. Welcome back to another TD Fitness episode. We are episode number 36 and the topic today is alcohol consumption; the good, the bad, and the bubbly, and I will tell you that the inspiration for this topic came from a new member to the TD Fitness family. He wrote me and basically said of all of the habits he can think of in his life the one that he probably felt he needed to focus on the most was his alcohol consumption. And this resonated with me because, number one, I've gotten this question a number of other times over the years, but really he was asking, you know, how much is too much? How much alcohol can and should I be consuming?

So let me tell you that what I usually do to prepare for and provide you with the best content for these episodes, I do a lot of research from different credible sources and end up gathering just a good amount of information. One of the resources that I found on this topic is actually from a friend and TD Fitness partner. Her name's Ashley Coff and she runs Better Nutrition, and she produced a video for her followers, which if you're not one, you should be. She's got some really great stuff there on the Better Nutrition website. But in this video she talks about why you, or when you shouldn't drink alcohol from a nutrition standpoint, not why you shouldn't, but when you should not drink alcohol from a nutrition standpoint, alcohol's affects on your weight loss efforts, how often you can have alcohol, and some of the differences between men and women in that regard, how much can you have or should you have at one time, and what is a better alcohol to consume, so this one's packed with content.

And I figured instead of curating that information and trying to relay some of the highlights to you, I figured hey, I think it's best if you just hear it from her, so with her permission I am embedding her seven minute video inside of this one. Now her video is pre-recorded, it was not created specifically for this episode of the TD Fitness Podcast, but I figured, hey today you get two for the price of one. So you're going hear from Ashley. So I'll talk a little bit about alcohol from a health coaching standpoint, and then I'm going to cut to her video and she's going to talk about the nutrition or the registered ... as a registered dietitian she's going to talk about it from a nutrition standpoint. And I'll also let you know how to get a pretty cool freebie from her. It's a single page handout of one of Ashley's guest appearances on the Dr. Oz Show, and it's called, What's a Better Wine Choice for You.

I'll give you more info on that though a little bit later. So I want to start with the reasons why. Why we want alcohol, why we feel the need or the desire to consume alcohol. And I think it's important to ask the question why because, as a health coach, you know, typically it's not necessarily the habits though that are the problems because we can change habits from time to time, but really it's the underlying reasons behind what causes those habits and what causes us to take particular or certain actions in a given situation. So one of the reasons we consume alcohol, and I'll paint the picture for you. And this one should ... it may sound familiar to you, it's certainly familiar to me. You have a long day at work, you come home and you come home to the family, and while the family is absolutely a blessing, there is also stress

with associated with that at time. You know you have small children, you have things that home that need to be taken care of, and you just want to get away.

You just want to relax for a little bit. You want to unwind, you want to de-stress, so you have a beer or a glass of wine, or two, or three. I do that sometimes myself and it seems reasonable right? It seems completely normal. So that's one of the reasons why you may elect to drink alcohol, just to kind of get away to relax a little bit. I think also about social settings. You know in college, which was a few years back for me, I remember drinking in many social settings and primarily because my inhibitions went away at that point right? But it was also a time where we all came together. We were very young and there was alcohol involved in that you know. And now I think about it in the current day since, at least for me, or in the stage of life that I'm in right now, I think about the happy hours. They're just more enjoyable and relaxing because alcohol has a way of calming people right if you don't consume too much of it.

It's the culture, a lot of times, in some of the occupations or the businesses that we grow up in, or that we work in. So the social setting is also contributes to maybe your desire, or your decision to consume alcohol. Some people just like the taste of alcohol, and that's fine too. Some people drink alcohol to help them sleep, and I will say that although a little bit of alcohol can help you fall asleep quickly, as the alcohol is metabolized and it leaves the body, you actually have a ... it has a negative affect on your sleep habits. So instead of staying asleep, the body just basically enters like lighter sleep and wakes up essentially time and time again. And that appears to get worse over time as more and more drinks are consumed, so that's something to consider. Alcohol to help you sleep is probably not a good way to go.

Some people consume alcohol just out of habit. So are you drinking because you consciously want to drink, or because it's a sub-conscious habit? We're going to talk a little bit more about that later. Now very quickly, alcohol can move from a simple indulgence to a craving to a habit, because of its addictive qualities and how it makes us feel. Alcohol is readily available. It's also more socially accepted, more so than smoking, for example. It's not viewed as abnormal if you drink alcohol. There's so many places, restaurants and so forth now that you can't smoke, smoking obviously being bad for you, but there you can pretty much get a drink at any restaurant and obviously any bar you go to. So it's more socially acceptable, which I think makes it more prevalent. Now those are some of the reasons why we consume, maybe why we crave alcohol outside of an addiction, that's another topic and one that we're not going to cover here in this episode.

This discussion is centered or catered more towards the health and habit side of alcohol consumption. Let's talk a little bit about dietary concerns, and primarily the calorie content. Now if you've listened to the TD Fitness Podcast for any length of time, you know that nutrition is obviously not just about calories, but to provide some perspective or a scale of comparison, let me tell you how calories from alcohol kind of rank when you're talking about carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. So carbohydrates and proteins contain about four calories per gram. Fats contain nine calories per gram, and alcohol comes in at seven calories per gram. So while fats are more calorically dense, over twice as many calories per gram than carbohydrates and proteins, alcohol is not far behind. So alcohol, again seven calories per gram, that's almost twice as much as a protein or carbohydrate.

And keep in mind to that, that calorie content can be higher when it's mixed with other caloric or sugary drinks. Ashley's going to talk a little bit about this in the video that I'm going to present to you in a little bit here. But alcohol can also affect ourself control, which can lead to overeating. It can lead to poor decision making, particularly when it comes to dietary choices. So these are some things to consider if you're concerned about your diet, your weight gain, for example, maybe take a look at your alcohol consumption. Now some of the dangers

associated with alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant and drinking can bring down your mood, and the more you drink the more your negative emotions come out, anxiety, anger, depression, those things can all bubble to the surface. And it may not seem that way while you're partaking and while your inhibitions are lowered, but essentially just the alcohol depressing that part of the brain that we use to control our actions.

When you talk about health and disease with respect to alcohol consumption, in 2014 The World Health Organization reported that alcohol contributed to more than 200 diseases and injury related health conditions to include alcohol dependence, sorosis of the liver, or liver disease, and certain types of cancers. And it's also, I was surprised to hear this, but alcohol is the third leading preventable cause of death in the United States, tobacco use being the first, and a poor diet and physical activity being the second. So those are some of the dietary concerns and dangers associated with alcohol. But what about the positives? I mean certainly we've heard that alcohol in moderation can be good for us. Right, you've heard that? Health and their health benefits associated with a moderate consumption of alcohol. So the dietary guidelines for Americans says that, for women you can have up to-

Says that for women you can have up to one drink a day, and for men up to two drinks a day. That will decrease the risk of heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. That's significant, but I'll tell you that these effects are quickly negated if you drink too much, if you drink more than those amounts or too much more than those amounts. Some of the studies actually cast doubt on this long held belief that there are health benefits from alcohol. Some of the science now says it depends on your age and your drinking habits. I would say that the truth is probably somewhere in the middle. It seems like for every piece of data that shows that there are health benefits, there's something else that may counter that. Generally speaking, it's been a long held belief, and there's a lot of research behind this that says that there are indeed health benefits with moderate alcohol consumption.

The caveat is that you should not start drinking to try to reap some of these health benefits. You're better off not drinking at all if you're not a drinker. If you don't drink now, don't just start to try to improve your health.

If some amounts of alcohol are good for you, then the logical question is how much is too much? I'm going to go over a couple of definitions here so we can kind of understand what's the difference between a heavy drinker and a light drinker and how do you stack up on that. We should start by talking about how a drink of alcohol is actually defined. What's the common rubric or measurement for a drink of alcohol, because it's important to know how much alcohol your drink contains?

In the United States, one standard drink contains roughly 14 grams of pure alcohol. Going back to the seven calories per gram, that's just under 100 calories in a drink of alcohol. 14 grams of alcohol can be found in about 12 ounces or a regular can of regular beer. It's usually about ... Beer comes in usually at about five percent alcohol by volume. Some of the lighter beers may be down in the low fours, 4.2% or so of alcohol content. A standard drink is also five ounces of wine, which is typically about 12% alcohol. Then there's the standard shot glass, which is 1.5 ounces of liquor or distilled spirits. That's typically about 40% alcohol.

That's how we define a drink. How much is too much? I mean, at what point should we be concerned about our consumption or the consumption by someone we know? Well, there's a threshold that separates being at a low risk for developing an alcohol use disorder and binge drinking and being a heavy user of alcohol. For women, low risk drinking is defined as no more than three drinks on any single day, and no more than seven drinks in a week. For men, it's defined as no more than four drinks on any single day, and no more than 14 drinks in a week.

Binge drinking is defined as having five or more alcoholic beverages for males or four or more alcoholic beverages for females on the same occasion. Within a span of a couple or a few hours on at least one day in a month. Binge drinking is five or more alcoholic drinks for males or four or more alcoholic drinks for females on the same occasion, so within the same few hour period. Heavy alcohol use is basically binge drinking on five or more days within a month. That's what's considered heavy alcohol use. These are the accepted definitions for low risk use and heavy use.

What I'm going to do now is cut to Ashley's video, because she provides some very good advice on this topic, again, from a registered dietitian standpoint. I want you to have a listen here. Learn how you can improve your alcohol habits, and I'll be right back after the video. The video is about seven minutes long.

Hi members. Today's nutrition lesson comes from one of your fellow members who said to me, "Ashley, what's better to drink?" When somebody asks me, "What's better to drink?", I don't think they're talking about water. In fact, I was right. This request went on to say: "Hey, it's a reality. I like to go out. I like to drink alcohol, but there are always these different that people are saying. 'Vodka's better for you,' or 'Bourbon's better for you,' or 'You should only drink wine.'" What I wanted to do today is break down, first of all, when you shouldn't drink alcohol. Then, if you are choosing to drink alcohol, what it means, how much you can have, how often you can have it. Let's have a talk about better alcohol nutrition.

When shouldn't you drink alcohol? If you're not better, i.e., if you are unhealthy, if you are coming to me or coming to any practitioner for health to help you get your better health, then you probably don't want to drink alcohol. Alcohol does many things in the body. One thing it does is it actually suppresses your immune system. The other thing that it does is the body actually has to digest it down a separate pathway. We don't have to go into all of that, but in doing that it actually does things with your metabolism and how you're digesting your other food. Net and net, if you're fighting a disease certainly, but even if you're a little under the weather or if you're coming back from somewhere where you've had alcohol and you're not feeling so good, it's a great time to not have more alcohol.

When else may you not want to have alcohol? Well, a lot of people come to me because they're trying to lose weight. In particular, fat mass. A lot of people are frustrated. Are you frustrated? A lot of people come to me saying like, "Look, Ashley, I'm trying. I followed your nutrition. I'm exercising. Maybe it's my supplements?" Then we start to talk about it, I see that there are two or three glasses of wine at night or two or three drinks at night, right? In that way, one of the things I want to say is before you look at your food and trying to food or you look and blame your supplements or you talk about how many more workouts you should be getting in, you have to recognize that alcohol doesn't just provide calories. As I was talking about before, it also can interfere with your metabolism. It can be what's keeping you back.

In weight loss, one of the things that I do for my patients is I want this to be a life style. I do want to be able to say, "Hey, if you want to have alcohol, we can include it." The way I think about alcohol is I think about it like a dessert. If you want to have a glass of wine, if you want to have a cocktail, if you want to have a beer at a ball game. First of all, there are such things as a day off. There are also such things as saying, "Okay, for this particular meal, I'm just going to do whatever. I know that at the next eating occasion and at the next day, I'm going to have to pick up for it. I'm also not thinking that that's going to be the day that my body loses weight."

If we're thinking about it as a dessert, what we want to think about it is all the different desserts we might have. In my world, I include cheese as a dessert, especially if it's coming at the end of the meal, but it could also be what's coming at the start of the meal. It could be a

cheese plate. It could also be certainly your sweets. I think it also we have to think about the other drinks that we're having. If you're having one of those funky coffee drinks in the day, that can be a dessert. If you're having a milkshake, that can be a dessert. Sometimes people will debate with me drinks versus desserts, and my whole point is if you want results, if you're coming to me for better results, here's what you need to think about. If you're having alcohol, think about it as a dessert.

What that means is the rest of your eating occasion should go like this. It should be a good source of proteins, healthy fats, non-starchy vegetables. If you're really trying to lose weight, you may want to skip your carbohydrate, and count your alcohol as a carbohydrate. Certain alcohols like your wine and your beer are carbohydrates, but something like a vodka soda might not be considered a carbohydrate, but it still is a great way to get that better nutrient balance including alcohol.

How often can you have alcohol? It's a little bit different depending on your life, your life stage, and your better health goals. Interestingly, women, we weren't given as much of this alcohol digesting enzyme as men, and, unfortunately for all of us adults, we lose. We don't make as much of that enzyme as we get older. As we get older, we actually want to drink less alcohol even though we feel like at times we may want to drink more, or you may notice that alcohol hits you harder. One of the other things that alcohol is going to be challenging on is the liver, and if you're taking any medications, as I said in the beginning, remember that those medications are almost all processed through the liver. They can be difficult on the liver as well. Better to be doing less. Less and less often.

This is one of those places where I'm not talking about better not perfect choices more often. I'm talking about better not perfect choices less often. The key thing is you want more days in your week that you don't have alcohol than the days that you do have alcohol. There are always exceptions if it's a vacation or a holiday, but I really would aim for you to have more days where you don't have alcohol. The reasons being it's better for your sleep, it's better for your skin, it's better for your digestion.

Okay, how much can you have at one time? Well, I like to go by the rule of ideally one drink for women, maybe two drinks for men. Again, part of it has to do with your size. It also have to do with where you are right now. If you're somebody who's having four or five drinks, let's start with less. Let's try to go down to two or three drinks. Also I want you to think about what you're putting into those drinks. Are you dessert-ifying those drinks? Are you doing things in your alcohol drinking that you wouldn't do in your food? For example, are you drinking juices adding fruit juice to your alcohol, but you wouldn't drink fruit juice normally because of the amount of liquid sugar that it's providing you?

Things to think about maybe better ways to upgrade or better drinking occasions if you will. Maybe you want to put a little bit of fruit, like a lemon, a lime, or even some berries, a little bit of watermelon, into some vodka with a soda.

The other part, and this is probably what I think is the most important. When people ask me what is the better alcohol to consume, I will answer just like what is the better dessert to consume: the one you think is delicious in that moment. If not, you're more likely to have more rather than really enjoy what it is that you're drinking.

Okay. Last things. If you overdo it on your drinking, try to, when you come home, have some water. Ideally have some coconut water, and perhaps start the next day with avocado. I love to blend it into a smoothie or have it cut up with some

Next day with avocado. I love to blend it into a smoothie or have it cut up with some tomato and do a little olive oil and a pinch of salt. You can also do some potatoes. That's going to give you ... All of these are going to give you some potassium, which will help restore the balance in the body. One of my favorites is a homeopathic remedy called Nux Vomica. Doesn't sound so appealing but let me tell you, if you really are heading towards a hangover, it's amazing. If you need more information on that, go ahead and shoot me an email. Thanks.

Alright. Me and Ashley have so much good advice to offer on this topic and so many other topics when it comes to nutrition and your health. So, again, you can learn more from Ashley and the Better Nutrition team by going to tdfitness.net/betternutrition, all one word. She's got a number of resources there to help you with your nutrition and healthy living efforts. To be clear, we have a partnership between TD Fitness and Better Nutrition. You can get 20% off of all of her products and services by using the code `tdfitness` at checkout on her site. With our partnership and business relationship, I do receive a small portion of the purchase there, so I just want to be clear on that.

Now, what I'd like to do now is briefly address some of the less obvious health coach related points with alcohol consumption and really, with any habit that you seek to better or improve on. If you think back to the beginning of the episode, the reason I started with why we drink is because once we know why, then we can address that root cause. So, we talked about it being a way to unwind for many people. To think about it as a way of de-stressing. Well, there are some other options to de-stress. So, of you're drinking to unwind and to relax a little bit some things that you could also do or do instead of drinking is exercise.

Exercise releases endorphins which is the natural feel good hormone. You can take part in activities that you enjoy, whether it's physical activities or other kind of calming activities. Things that calm you like hobbies and so forth. The point is that you can start to replace at least some of your alcohol consumption with other relaxing things and get a little bit better over time. Okay? We talked about drinking in social settings. For me, what works is being absolutely clear about whether I'm going to drink or how much I will consume before taking part in a social event like that. Make the decision beforehand because a lot of the time, if you don't have a plan in place, then you're going to make poorer decisions when you in the heat of the moment.

If you don't want to drink, then don't plan to. And if you do plan to drink, then plan to drink responsibly. We talked about the taste. So if you like the taste of alcohol, think about how you treat other things that you like the taste of but that could cause harm to you or are not as healthy to you if you overindulge. I love Ashley's advice about treating alcoholic drinks as desserts in your nutrition planning. I mean, I love cake. Right? But I'm not going to eat an entire cake. So if you like the taste of alcohol, partake in a reasonable amount just to quench that craving or quench the taste of that craving I should say and then move on to something else.

We talked briefly about better rest. So, again, alcohol is not the answer here. A better diet can help with your rest patterns. Exercise. Again, de-stress by taking some obligations or some of the stressors off your plate and out of your life. Be diligent about when you go to bed and when you get up. Your quality of rest is largely a result of how much stress you're carrying in your life. Your quality of life is largely dependent on how well you rest. Let me say that again. Your quality of rest is largely a result of how much stress you're carrying in your life and your quality of life is largely dependent on how well you rest. There is an interdependency there so in order to improve one, you have to improve the other one. Alright?

So, the other point I'd like to make besides identifying the reason why you drink and looking for alternatives or alternative answers to that why is this. Ask yourself, are there triggers to my alcohol consumption? Do you have a drinking buddy that you drink with every time you see him or her? Or do you come home and sit on the couch, tune to your favorite show every night and is that the trigger maybe for drinking that beer? There are often times subconscious actions that trigger subsequent actions. So if we can identify these triggers, these actions, these moods, feelings, and ask 'do I really need that drink right now or am I just used to having it here in this moment?' This is some powerful stuff.

When you start to take back control of your actions, that pendulum begins to shift just ... You go from just hanging on in life to actually being in more of the drivers seat. That is so important when it comes to behavior change and incorporating healthy habits into your lifestyle. By the way, you should never be in the drivers seat if you've been drinking. Alright? See what I did there? Alright. Anyway.

Recap. The question so many people wanted to know, how much is too much and when should I be concerned about how much I drink. So, again, men up to two drinks a day can have some health benefits, no more than four drinks a day and no more than 14 drinks in a week. You'll stay in the low risk drinker category. Women, up to one drink a day may have some health benefits, but no more than three a day and not more than seven per week. Still low risk. For men and women, five or more drinks on the same occasion is binge drinking. Binge drinking on five or more days in the month is heavy alcohol use.

Before I move on, the obligatory disclaimer. A couple of things that I cannot go without mentioning. There are certain people who should alcohol completely. These include, if you're planning to drive a vehicle or operate any kind of heavy machinery. If you're taking medications that can interact with the alcohol and a lot of times we won't know what kind of interactions alcohol and our medications may have. So if you on medication, it's probably just safest to stay away from the alcohol while you're taking that medicine. If you have a medical condition that alcohol can aggravate, I'm sorry, aggravate or if you're pregnant or trying to become pregnant. Okay? Stay away from the alcohol.

If you consume alcohol, it should be consumed in moderation. Alright? That's kind of the takeaway from this whole thing. You know with every episode here on TD Fitness, we start out by saying we're giving you ways to live a healthier life without giving up the things that make life worth living. So, I'm not telling you to stop enjoying life. I'm saying that you understand where you fall on the spectrum of alcohol consumption and, if necessary, take steps to improve that aspect of your health and habits. Okay? Not to be perfect but just to be better.

Now, I mentioned a freebie at the beginning of the episode. Again, it's a single page handout that Ashley created after one of her guest appearances on Dr. Oz and it's called What's a Better Wine Choice for You. So to get that freebie, here's what you do. You text, in all caps, just text WINE123, all one word okay. WINE123 to the number 44222. Okay? Again, text WINE123 to the number 44222. I'll put that in the show notes okay. The show notes for this episode can be found at tdfitness.net/036 and you can listen or watch or grab the freebie there. You can read the transcript. I'll have links to all of the things that I referenced here.

I want to thank you so much again for tuning in and remember to check out Ashley and the Better Nutrition crew at tdfitness.net/betternutrition and use that 20% off discount code. The tdfitness discount code. One other thing, I'll also provide a link to a cool alcohol calorie calculator that I found online. I'll put that in the show notes as well. That's all I have for you guys in this episode. Drink responsibly and Coach T out.