

A Healthy Happy Hour

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Celebrate Sensibly this Holiday Season



There's nothing like an early evening gathering with friends to help you wind down from a long day. Happy hour social events and holiday gatherings provide fabulous forums for catching up with colleagues, networking with neighbors, or just relaxing. You may even choose to enjoy an alcoholic beverage or two. However, behind every half-priced appetizer creeps the calories that can undo all your hard work. Socializing is great—but to prevent your happy hour from turning into a painful calorie crash, you'll want to make responsible choices based on sound information.

The Nitty Gritty Numbers

"All things in moderation." We hear this about food all the time, but the same goes for alcohol. If you do drink alcohol,

the key is to do so responsibly and on a limited basis. So what is moderate drinking? Moderate drinking is generally considered to be *average* daily consumption of up to one drink per day for women, and up to two drinks per day for men.

What, exactly, constitutes a "drink"? A standard drink serving is 12 oz. of beer, 1.5 oz. of distilled spirits (80-proof, 40% alcohol), or 5 oz. of wine. According to the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, each of these yields 0.6 oz. of alcohol—or 14 g. of pure alcohol—and anywhere between 100-150 calories.

Too Much of a Good Thing

A survey published in April 2009 by the online medical journal *PLOS Medicine* found that 76 percent of men and 65 percent of women consumed

alcohol at some point in the last year. There are benefits to moderate alcohol consumption, along with significant drawbacks when alcohol intake becomes excessive.

First, the bad news: Heavy drinking increases health risks in a number of ways. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services noted that heavy drinking is associated with increased hypertension, cirrhosis of the liver, certain types of cancer, injury, and violence. According to a 2010 paper published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), heavy alcohol consumption plays a role in the majority of deaths from injury in the developed world; it is estimated that up to 90,000 deaths per year in the United States are attributable to the misuse of alcohol.

While alcoholic beverages are not to be served at chapter functions, TOPS realizes that some of our adult members enjoy having an occasional drink. This article provides great information regardless of your preference and does not condone or condemn the consumption of alcoholic beverages. As always, we advise you to make sensible choices for your healthy lifestyle.

Good to Know

In general, one alcohol exchange has about 100 calories. TOPS does not have a recommended number of exchanges for alcohol because it should be enjoyed in moderation when trying to manage weight. Remember that alcohol calories are *empty* calories.

There is good news as well: researchers have found that moderate alcohol intake is associated with a lower risk of atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and a slight increase in HDL cholesterol levels (the “good” cholesterol). The USDA goes on to say, “Moderate evidence suggests that among free-living populations, moderate drinking is not associated with weight gain. However, heavier consumption over time is associated with weight gain.” If you do not currently drink alcohol, it is not recommended that you take up the habit for health benefits; if you do drink, there is encouragement to keep within moderation standards in order to reap the good things.

Watch Out When You’re Out

When you hit the town for happy hour, bear in mind that many happy hour drink and appetizer specials are calorie minefields. The types of drinks you might order may have as many as 650 calories for a piña colada, 750 calories for a margarita, and 800 calories for a Long Island iced tea. Top that off with hundreds—and in some cases thousands—of calories from chip baskets, jalapeno poppers, French fries, and... you get the idea!

We’re always looking for more ways to add vegetables to our diets, and many appetizers *sound* healthy. Yet, even the ones that say they include vegetables are often calorie bombs. After all, vegetables are good for you until you deep-fry them. And what about bruschetta; that’s all vegetables, right? It *is* made from vegetables—with *lots* of added olive oil. (For example, Olive Garden’s bruschetta appetizer has 950 calories,

13 g. of fat, and 2860 mg. of sodium!) Take a look at Table 1 for more insider information on appetizer calorie counts.

If you want to enjoy happy hour but not fill up on fatty starters, order a side salad with protein on top and dressing on the side. Then you can munch away smartly.

Entertaining at Home

Consider inviting people over to your house for happy hour as an alternative to going out. That way, you can control the cost, the calories, and the content of the drinks. The Distilled Spirits Council offers these five tips for hosting responsible cocktail parties:

- Make appealing non-alcoholic beverages available for everyone.
- Provide food to complement your cocktails.
- Designate a bartender to serve your guests and keep an eye on how much everyone is drinking.
- Remember serving sizes: A standard serving size is 5 oz. of wine, 12 oz. of beer, and 1.5 oz. of 80-proof (40% alcohol by volume) liquor.

TABLE 1 - Dine with Discretion: Here are some overloaded appetizers from a number of national chain restaurants.

Selected Appetizer	Nutrition Information
*Applebee’s Mozzarella Sticks	Per serving: 930 calories, 48 g. fat, 2640 mg. sodium
*Applebee’s Spicy Chili Cheese Nachos	Per serving: 1520 calories, 94 g. fat, 3070 mg. sodium
*Chili’s Boneless Buffalo Wings with Bleu Cheese	Per serving: 1040 calories, 67 g. fat, 3630 mg. sodium
*Chili’s Bottomless Tostada Chips with Salsa	Per basket: 910 calories, 45 g. fat, 1590 mg. sodium
*Outback Steakhouse Bloomin’ Onion	Per onion (serves 6): 1959 calories, 161 g. fat, 4102 mg. sodium
*TGI Friday’s Crispy Green Bean Fries	Per serving: 900 calories, 65 g. fat, 1720 mg. sodium
*TGI Friday’s Loaded Potato Skins	Per serving: 2040 calories, 131 g. fat, 2230 mg. sodium

* **Editor’s note:** These and other popular chain restaurants are included in *Nutrition in the Fastlane 2012*, a handy purse-sized guide that lists exchanges and calories for menu items. Copies are available online in the TOPS store.

TABLE 2 - Smart Selections: The following are suggestions for alternate items to choose for lower calorie and fat intake.

Instead of...	Choose this...
Calamari	Ceviche
Queso cheese dip	Salsa or pico de gallo
Chicken fingers or wings	Chicken satay or grilled chicken
Butter on bread	Hummus
Fried green beans	Edamame (boiled soybeans)
Loaded potato skins	Baked potato with salsa
Coconut or fried shrimp	Shrimp cocktail
Slider burgers on bread	Lettuce wraps
Mozzarella cheese sticks	Seared ahi or smoked salmon

- Make sure your guests have a safe way home, using either designated drivers or taxis.

Happy hour should be just that: a happy occasion. But it can be a healthy one, too. Keep your calories to a minimum by planning and snacking ahead of time, ordering wisely, pacing yourself, and cutting it off when the time is right. As the year winds to a close, celebrate sensibly and—above all—don't forget to raise a toast to your good health!

STRATEGIC STEPS FOR DINING OUT

At times, it may feel like you're doomed if you venture out with the after-work crowd. However, you can still keep to your diet with a little forethought and willpower. Table 2 (above) highlights tasty appetizer alternatives. In addition, here are tips for sticking to your health objectives during after-hours fun:

Make a Plan

If you know where the group is headed, jump online, and check out the restaurant's menu. If nutrition information is posted, pre-select what you will order when you get there.

Eat Ahead

Have a small snack—like a piece of fruit or a handful of unsalted nuts—before you meet up, so that you're not starving when that bowl of chips passes underneath your nose.

Share with Friends

Avoid a calorie coma by sharing an appetizer with other people. Concentrate on savoring a few bites of a delectable treat rather than devouring the whole thing yourself.

TIPS TO KEEP YOUR COCKTAILS AND CALORIES IN CHECK

Drinking alcohol in moderation requires intention and follow-through. Check out these tipping tips to keep your cocktails in check:

Consume with Caution

Alcohol is a toxin, and consuming alcohol on an empty stomach leads to more rapid intoxication. Food in your stomach acts as a buffer, decreasing absorption time in the blood stream. Having a healthy snack before cocktails slows down alcohol absorption and keeps you in control.

Drink Slowly

Your liver can process approximately one drink per hour—although it may be even less in smaller people. Pace yourself: Start with water or iced tea, and “save” cocktails until later. Try putting your glass down and conversing between drinks to slow your slurping.

Work Water In

Drink one or two glasses of water for every alcoholic beverage you consume. Alcohol increases the volume of water you excrete and can lead to dehydration. Hydrate as you drink to reduce headaches down the road.

Mix Like a Master

Alcohol contains calories, but the real mess is often in the mixers. Stay away from calorie bombs like regular soda, tonic water, or juices. Instead, opt for club soda and a splash of juice for flavor—without the sugary side effects.

If you entertain at home, check out the following page for low-calorie drink recipes you can serve.

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Holiday Drinks • Non-Alcoholic

Coffee Dessert

Ingredients

- 1 c. brewed coffee
- 1 t. sugar
- ¼ c. low-fat vanilla ice cream
- Cinnamon sticks for garnish

Instructions

1. Mix all ingredients together.
2. Garnish with cinnamon sticks.

Nutrition Information

- Makes one 8-oz. serving
- Per 8-oz. serving: 75 calories, 1.6 g. fat, 12 g. carbohydrates, 30 mg. sodium, 2 g. protein, 12 g. sugar
- Exchanges per 8-oz. serving: 0.5 sweets/desserts/other carbohydrates, 0.5 fat

Cranberry Spritzer

Ingredients

- 2 c. sparkling mineral water, any berry flavor
- 2 c. light cranberry juice
- Fresh cranberries for garnish

Instructions

1. Mix all ingredients together with ice.
2. Garnish with cranberries.

Nutrition Information

- Makes four 1-cup servings
- Per 8-oz. cup serving: 16 calories, 0 g. fat, 4 g. carbohydrates, 8 g. sodium, 0 g. protein, 4 g. sugar
- Exchanges per 8-oz. serving: 0.5 sweets/desserts/other carbohydrates

Spiced Hot Cider

Ingredients

- 4 c. apple cider 5 cloves
- 1 cinnamon stick 1 T. orange zest

Instructions

1. Place all ingredients in a large pot and simmer for 5 minutes.
2. Serve warm.

Nutrition Information

- Makes four 1-cup servings
- Per 8-oz. serving: 120 calories, 0.5 g. fat, 30 g. carbohydrates, 11 g. sodium, 0 g. protein, 23 g. sugar
- Exchanges per serving: 2 sweets/desserts/other carbohydrates

Holiday Drinks • Alcoholic

Low-Calorie Egnog

Ingredients

- 2 eggs, separated
- 4 c. fat-free milk
- 1 t. vanilla
- 2 t. sugar substitute
- 1/4 c. brandy
- A dash of nutmeg

Instructions

1. Add egg yolks and milk to a saucepan. Cook over medium heat until somewhat thickened; will coat a metal spoon. Set aside to cool.
2. Beat the egg whites into soft peaks. Add the milk mixture, vanilla, and sugar substitute.
3. Mix, cover, and chill in the refrigerator.
4. Sprinkle with nutmeg when serving.

Nutrition Information

- Makes four 1-cup servings
- Per 8-oz. serving: 165 calories, 3 g. fat, 13 carbohydrates, 163 mg. sodium, 11 g. protein, 13 g. sugar
- Exchanges per 8-oz. serving: 1 alcohol, 1 fat-free milk, .25 lean meat substitute

Cranberry Martini

Ingredients

- 1 c. vodka
- 1/4 c. dry vermouth
- 1/2 c. light cranberry juice
- Garnish with frozen cranberries

Instructions

1. Shake vodka, vermouth, and cranberry juice over ice for about 10-15 seconds.
2. Pour into chilled martini glasses.

Nutrition Information

- Makes four martinis
- Per martini: 156 calories, 0 g. fat, 1.3 g. carbohydrates, 3 g. sodium, 0 g. protein, 1.5 g. sugar
- Exchanges: 2 alcohol, .25 fruit

Special thanks to Cara Archer, dietetic intern from Utah State University, for creating the drinks recipes in this article. ■