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Alcohol by Volume: Beer, Wine, & Liquor

Learn more about how alcohol by volume (ABV), ounces, and proof are all measurements for understanding how much alcohol is in a standard serving.

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The 2015-2020 U.S. Dietary Guidelines advises that if alcohol is consumed, it should be in moderation—with women of legal age drinking up to one standard drink per day and men of legal age consuming up to two standard drinks per day.

However, many may not understand what constitutes a “standard” drink serving size. Whether it’s a craft beer, mixed cocktail or a glass of wine at a winery, it’s important to



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Our aim in this article is to educate you about the different levels of alcohol in different beverage types and measures. However, if you are concerned that you or someone you care about is abusing alcohol on a regular basis, please call our confidential hotline at [1-866-586-7443](tel:1-866-586-7443) and speak to an American Addiction Centers staff member about options for help.

According to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a standard drink contains around 14 grams (0.6 ounces) of pure alcohol.¹ In the U.S., this can generally be found in:¹

- 12 ounces of beer, or one bottle at 5% ABV.
- 8 ounces of malt liquor at 7% ABV.
- 5 ounces of wine at 12% ABV.
- 1.5 ounces of hard liquor, or one shot, at 40% ABV.
- 8-9 ounces of malt liquor at 7% ABV.

ABV Effects: Pour Size, Alcohol Type and Other Factors

Although standard drink sizes are used to help people make informed decisions about their drinking, not all alcoholic beverages meet the criteria to be considered a standard drink. See how different types of alcohol can vary amongst each other and within their own category below:

Beer Alcohol Content

One standard serving of beer is 12 ounces, or about the size



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Therefore, if you're drinking a 12-ounce beer at 5% ABV, that equals 0.6 ounces of alcohol per serving. However, if you're consuming a craft beer such as an IPA at a local brewery, your alcohol per serving can be closer to 0.9 ounces and will therefore take the liver longer to process.

Wine Alcohol Content

Although a standard serving of wine is 5 ounces and generally contains between 11-13% alcohol by volume, not all wines are created equal.² The same goes for the amount poured, whether it's at a restaurant or at home with friends. White wine generally is on average 10% ABV; however, it can range from as little as 5% to as much as 14%.³

Moscato white wines have less alcohol, at 5-7%, while pinot grigio wines may contain 12-13% alcohol, and chardonnay may have 13-14.5%. Red wine has more alcohol, ranging from 12% to 15%.³ Pinot noir and Boudreaux contain 13-14% ABV, Malbec wines contain 13.5-15%, and some Californian zinfandels and Australian shiraz wines can have ABVs as high as 16-18%.³ A 5-ounce pour of pinot grigio is likely to be about one actual serving, but the same pour of a California zinfandel can approach 1.5 servings.³

Liquor Alcohol Content

There are several kinds of distilled spirits, or hard liquors, on the market such as gin, bourbon, whiskey, vodka, tequila, liqueurs, and absinthe. These forms of alcohol are distilled so they have a higher concentration of alcohol by volume; as a result, the standard serving size is very small.

A serving of distilled spirits is about 1.5 ounces, which is the



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should not contain or be more than one shot to be considered a standard drink.

Fortified Wine Alcohol Content

Fortified wines are wines to which a distilled beverage has been added, usually brandy (grape spirits).⁵ Sherry, port, madeira are all forms of high-proof wine, and they should be served in much smaller servings.³ Most fortified wines range from 17% to 21% ABV.³ NIAAA considers a standard serving of fortified wines to be 3-4 ounces.⁴

Malt Liquor Alcohol Content

Although the word *liquor* is in its name, these beverages are closer in alcohol content to beer than distilled spirits. NIAAA considers a standard serving to be 8-9 ounces, as malt liquors are typically about 7% alcohol.⁴

You Might Also Be Interested In

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When a person drinks alcohol, it enters into their bloodstream and is carried into their organs.⁶ In healthy people, blood circulates through the body in 90 seconds, which means they can begin to feel the effects of alcohol within 15 to 45 minutes after the first drink.⁶

Further, the liver can metabolize one standard drink an hour. Factors such as age, weight, gender, personal metabolism, and amount of food eaten also play a role in how fast the body can process alcohol.⁷ A person's blood alcohol concentration (BAC) level is reduced by 0.015 per hour or at an average rate of .015 g/100mL/hour. This process cannot be sped up with time, sleep, food, or other methods.⁷ Meaning, you can't flush alcohol out of your system once it's in, no matter how hard you try.

Depending on how it is being measured, alcohol can be detected in a person's system:⁹

- **Blood:** Up to 6 hours
- **Breath:** 12-24 hours
- **Saliva:** 12-24 hours
- **Urine:** 12-24 hours
- **Hair:** 90 Days

How Do You Know When You're Drunk?

The [effects of alcohol](#) can vary from person to person, and it may take some people a quicker or longer time to start seeing signs of intoxication when drinking the same amount of alcohol. Typically, for males with little to no tolerance, they



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alcohol tolerance, general impairment levels are observed at the following BAC levels:⁸

- 0.05% = detectible
- 0.07% = driving impaired
- 0.10% = intoxicated
- 0.20% = decreased consciousness
- 0.30% = unconscious
- 0.40% = fatal

When a person with BAC levels between 0.10% and 0.20% does not show obvious signs of intoxication, it typically means they've developed a tolerance for alcohol.⁸ This means they most likely are regularly drinking heavily and are showing characteristics of dependence.⁸

Signs and Symptoms of Intoxication

As alcohol begins to enter the bloodstream, physical, behavioral, and mental changes will begin to occur. Signs and symptoms of intoxication can range from mild to severe, and include:⁹

- Lowered inhibitions.
- Euphoria, excitability.
- Slurred speech.
- Impaired coordination.
- Confusion.



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- Breathing problems (e.g., decreased respiratory effort, respiratory depression).
- Vomiting.
- Unconsciousness.

Risks of Alcohol Abuse

An estimated 14.8 million people aged 12 or older had an alcohol use disorder (AUD) in 2018, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health report.¹⁰ This means that about 1 in 9 people, or 5.4% of Americans, are struggling with the disease.¹⁰ When it comes to monitoring your own drinking habits, keeping track of your blood alcohol levels and knowing how fast alcohol is metabolized can help you avoid risky drinking habits that could create more serious issues in the future or turn into an AUD. Being better informed about the dangers of alcohol can also help avoid a cycle of growing tolerance, physical dependence, and a compulsive pattern of use that can develop into a potential addiction.

Drinking Guidelines

Drinking more than one or two drinks in an evening is likely to approach binge drinking, and more than two drinks per day is over the CDC's guidelines on

heavy drinking.



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Ryan Kelley is a nationally registered Emergency Medical Technician and the former managing editor o... [Read More](#)



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