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# YOU BOOZIE you LOSE!

How much does your tippie affect your fitness? Nutritionist Christine Bailey has the lowdown....

At the end of a hard day, many of us like to reward ourselves with a relaxing drink or two. But, if you're serious about your fitness and performance, you may want to rethink just how much you really fancy that drink.

The UK is well known as a nation of binge drinkers. The General Lifestyle Survey 2008 showed that 14 percent of women drank more than double their recommended units on at least one day in the previous week. What's more, over the last decade, the rate of binge drinking among young women has increased. But, what about athletes and keen exercisers - are they any different? Alcohol has long been used to celebrate victories and quench thirst after a match.

Unfortunately, toasting your workout with post-exercise drinks can undo all your good work you've just put in.

## what's the damage?

Booze affects your body in a number of ways, many of which can have an impact on our fitness. Alcohol stimulates the heart to beat faster, and widens blood vessels, but also depresses the nervous system, which can reduce exercise performance by impairing balance, coordination, visual perception and reaction time. It has also been shown to have a negative effect on strength, power and endurance and may impair body temperature regulation during prolonged exercise in the cold - which is worth remembering if you enjoy skiing.

**Drink Tip** If you think it's all bad news, there is some evidence to suggest that one drink per day may lower your risk of cardiovascular disease. Wine could be the best option.

“Don't be fooled into thinking you can 'sweat' out alcohol”



If you're prone to injuries, alcohol is not good news. Drinking can damage muscle cells, exacerbate inflammation and slow down recovery time. It also interferes with absorption of nutrients needed for energy production, nerve and muscle health. Also, alcohol is not a great idea if you're after glowing, healthy looking skin this summer. Every time you have a drink, the blood vessels will dilate and can remain permanently dilated, losing their tone. This can lead to broken capillaries, redness, flushing and pimply bumps characteristic of acne rosacea.

### lads vs ladettes

Unfortunately for us ladies, alcohol has a more pronounced effect on our health. This is because women's bodies contain less water and more fat than our male counterparts, which means the drink we consume is less diluted. Plus, female bodies produce less alcohol dehydrogenase (ADH) – the enzyme responsible for breaking alcohol down so that our bodies can eliminate it. This can explain why we tend to feel the effects of booze more at lunchtime, as we make less of these enzymes during the day. Less water and less ADH mean that alcohol stays in our bodies, for longer.

### looking ahead

Long-term, there are more serious health implications. Women are more likely than men to develop alcohol-related liver disease and brain damage. Plus, studies show that drinking one unit of alcohol per day can increase a woman's risk of breast cancer by six percent, and those who drink three glasses or more a day face a whopping 30 percent higher risk! Overdoing the sauce may also harm bone health, as it affects the absorption of calcium and vitamin D, and interferes with hormone levels that influence bone formation. Your risk of throat, mouth and oesophagus cancers are also associated with a higher alcohol intake. But, if you think it's all bad news, there is some evidence to suggest that one drink per day may lower your risk of cardiovascular disease. Wine could be the best option, as resveratrol – a super nutrient found in the skin of grapes – is thought to have particularly beneficial effects. It contains antioxidant properties, and may increase the level of 'good' cholesterol, which is responsible for keeping your arteries clear.

### beer belly

If you're aiming to hone your bikini body this summer, bear in mind that alcohol contains

seven calories per gram, which is higher than carbohydrates and proteins (four cals per gram). And, these calories can quickly add up. For example, two large glasses of red wine contain around 300 calories. To burn this off, a 9st (57kg) woman would have to cycle for 50 minutes, jog for 35 minutes or swim for 40 minutes! And, being tipsy is also likely to weaken your resolve, so you're more likely to snack on high-cal foods. Despite being calorie dense, alcohol is

not, a useful fuel source for exercise. In fact, it interferes with glucose metabolism. This can lead to an increased risk of hypoglycaemia (low blood-sugar), which means that your body's fuel starts to run out earlier, and then fatigue sets in, and exercise intensity falls. And, don't be fooled into thinking you can 'sweat' out alcohol. Only a very small amount can be detected in sweat – most of it is metabolised by your liver. "While I wouldn't want to take the fun from the occasional drink, you need to remember what the consequences are going to be in terms of hydration, energy, fat and the potential effects on performance in both training and competition," says Conrad Rowland, experienced runner, athlete and coach of Slough Junior Athletics Club. "Don't forget that alcohol is a very

## “Booze has been shown to have a negative effect on endurance”

concentrated source of energy and if it's taken in excess to your energy requirements, it will be stored as fat!

### how much?

According to current government guidelines, the recommended daily amount is 2-3 units for women and 3-4 units for men. A single unit of alcohol is 125ml of a wine that is eight percent alcohol by volume (ABV). But, in recent years

## What is a unit of alcohol?

- Half pint of standard beer/lager (four percent ABV)
- One pint of standard low alcohol beer (two percent ABV)
- 100ml wine or champagne (less than a small glass)
- 60ml fortified wine eg port
- 25ml spirits

wines have become much stronger and standard measures larger. So, even if you stick to a single glass, you could easily be drinking more than the daily recommended amount. To calculate your daily intake, visit [drinkaware.co.uk](http://drinkaware.co.uk) and try the unit calculator.

To avoid the training pitfalls that booze can bring, you don't have to go teetotal, just be wise about when you choose to drink.

"Don't be tempted to rehydrate after a workout with a beer. Alcohol is a diuretic, so it can exacerbate dehydration," explains Ian Craig, Sports Nutritionist and personal trainer.

"Dehydration is a major problem for many athletes. Water loss of four percent of your body weight can result in 15 percent drop in work capacity". Alcohol may also lead to poor refuelling just when your body needs to replace the depleted stores of glycogen in the muscles. So, as with most things, moderation is key.

## FANCY A TIPPLE?

Follow these tips to avoid the drawbacks:

- Only indulge on non-training days
- If that fails, after exercise, always refuel and rehydrate first with carbohydrate, a small amount of protein and plenty of non-alcohol fluids, before drinking alcohol
- Don't drink on an empty stomach
- Pass on the sauce 48 hours before competitions or hard training sessions
- Avoid binge drinking – follow government guidelines
- Shun booze if you have an injury, especially if you're taking medication
- The rate the body metabolises cannot be speeded up. As a guideline, stick to one unit per hour

