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TAKING RISKS

○ THE VERITAS ON VINO

by Brett Osborn, DO, FAANS, CSCS, & Jay Campbell

Does fitness have a drinking problem? The real deal on alcohol, aging, and performance

Alcohol is deeply intertwined into modern society. For years the media has quoted select studies that praise moderate alcohol consumption for its distinctive benefits to vascular health and the way it promotes nitric-oxide formation leading to improved virility. Yet plenty of other studies discuss its consumption as a serious health risk.

Alcohol and fitness have an oddly close relationship. Its use and abuse often carries over into our passion for competition in sports and strength training. Even the hardest of the hardcore in the fitness community are known to

consume alcohol in excess. (Go hit some bars in Columbus, Ohio, the weekend of the Arnold Sports Festival and you'll see what we mean.) Unfortunately, many people use alcohol for its powers to stimulate a feeling of well-being and reduce social inhibitions. It seems to allow athletes a momentary escape from the stress of continuous training.

A clinical study performed by scientist at John Moores University in Liverpool, England, states the case this way: "Alcohol use, particularly excessive alcohol consumption is one of the most serious health risks in the world. A relationship between sport, exercise and alcohol consumption is clear and long-standing. Alcohol continues to be the most frequently consumed drug among athletes and habitual exercisers and alcohol-related problems appear to be more common in these individuals."

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Summoning Evil Spirits

Alcohol can be classified as either a food or a drug. As a food, it is quite calorically dense. At seven calories per gram, alcohol provides almost twice the calories per gram of either carbohydrates or protein, but still fewer than a gram of fat. Alcohol is often known as the anti-nutrient because it directly interferes with the body's absorption, storage, and use of other nutrients. Calories from alcohol are considered empty because alcoholic beverages contain only negligible amounts of vitamins and minerals. It's puzzling why anyone interested in building and maintaining an awesome physique would want to fuel their body with alcohol.

As a drug, alcohol is classified as a depressant and appears to have a two-part response: an initial sensation of excitement followed by depressive psychomotor effects. Men are less sensitive to the drug than women due to certain enzymatic reactions in their digestive system allowing them to dispose of the alcohol before it reaches their bloodstream.



ANTI-AGING



It seems that fitness enthusiasts think that training hard and eating clean can protect them from the damages of binge drinking. Not only is that idea false, it becomes less and less true the older you get.

As many studies show, alcohol truly consumed in moderation has been shown to offer multiple health benefits. If you are dead set on consuming a beer or drinking a glass of red wine every now and then, very little harm will come to you provided you also strength train, perform endurance work, and eat a clean diet rich in protein, essential fatty acids, and clean carbohydrates.

However, the very idea of moderate alcohol consumption as a health benefit is kind of a misnomer. Who really drinks alcohol moderately anyway? American culture glamorizes drinking beer or taking shots at every opportunity. It's part of our sports and TV culture. Watch a game and have a few brews. Go to a concert or play and open up some red wine. Mexican food means margaritas. Sound familiar?

If you are drinking alcohol to get drunk, you must understand the following side effects you're likely to experience.

- Alcohol is directly converted to triglycerides (fat) in the human bloodstream.
- These triglycerides will then show up in areas where you are prone to store body fat, usually the gut for men and the hips for women.

- In men, alcohol consumption lowers testosterone and increases estrogen.

- For females (more so than males) it dramatically increases the effects of aging on appearance and leads to a host of other potential increased risks like osteoporosis and vascular damage.

- Alcohol's effect on the liver can interfere with the production of adenosine triphosphate synthesis (ATP), a direct energy source for muscles.

- Alcohol will unwind any positive physique gains you made from your dietary efforts of the previous week.

- It can increase your causative risk factors for the many diseases of aging, including but not limited to diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and diseases of the liver.

If your goal is to age gracefully and possess a quality physique with noticeable muscularity and definition and youthful features

with strong skin elasticity, then you need to minimize your alcohol consumption once you hit 35. This will not only allow you to look better, your body will thank you with better health for years to come. Additionally, the mental and emotional benefits of limiting your alcohol consumption will be a boon to your relationships and allow you to live a life from a powerful platform. Here is our recommendation based on age range.

In your 20s: If you have above-average genetics and good insulin sensitivity, you can maintain a quality physique and still enjoy alcohol in moderation on weekends. And we mean moderation.

In your 30s: Once Father Time changes the equation in your early to mid-30s, continuing to binge drink leads to disastrous consequences to the composition of your body. Think estrogenic fat deposition (the dreaded "dad bod"), a beer gut, weak muscle strength, and a total lack of endurance both in the gym and in the bedroom. Yes, you read that right. Excess alcohol consumption can lead to sexual dysfunction. Over-imbibing can also impose permanent negative effects on the brain.

In your 40s: In addition to the problems already mentioned, drinking excess alcohol will destroy your skin. Your face will look leathery and aged, and your nose will appear permanently red and puffy.

If you aspire to be fit well into your 40s but you're still getting hammered on weekends, you need to ask whether you truly desire to be the best version of yourself. If so, what steps are you willing to take to ensure you live a life filled with great health and the best possible physique you can attain? By curbing your alcohol intake, you have everything to gain and only body fat to lose. **IM**