You’re an “average” drinker. Maybe you like to chill out with a cocktail after a hard day at work. And maybe you enjoy a glass of wine with dinner or a beer or two during the game of the week.

You don’t depend on drinking to relax or to get through the day, and alcohol’s never caused, or contributed to, any problems for you, at least not any real problems.

Basically, you can take booze or leave it, and drinking doesn’t seem that big a deal.

Cool!

This pamphlet’s for you, the “average,” not-necessarily-problem drinker, one who’s curious about the health effects of moderate drinking.

Of course, alcoholism is a long-term risk associated with drinking. And there are plenty of “average” people who started out drinking moderately and ended up staying at the party too long.

In fact, according to a recent estimate by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 17.6 million Americans are problem drinkers.

Any one of them should be able to tell you that problem drinking can be a real problem, indeed. But it’s not the only problem tied to drinking, not by a long shot.

That’s because alcohol is a complicated chemical that produces a tangle of health effects (and problems), and you don’t have to drink too much to have them show up in your life.

In fact, maybe no more than you already drink.

You can always drink too much, whether you’re drinking shots or piña coladas with little umbrellas on the side.

So how much alcohol is too much? Well, that depends on who you are and how you define “too much.” Statistically, Americans drank an average of 2.31 gallons of ethyl alcohol per person in 2007. That’s equal to about 50 gallons of beer, 20 gallons of wine, or five gallons of liquor.

That’s a lot no matter who’s counting—and who’s pouring.

Still, whether or not your particular slice of that consumption is too much can depend on a lot of factors, including social setting (Dinner with your boss or bowling with the boys?), individual habits (Are you used to drinking a little, a lot, or at all?), and even time of day (A 7 o’clock martini attracts different types of attention, depending on whether it takes place at 7 o’clock in the morning or evening).

One thing about drinking that doesn’t change is the rate at which alcohol is metabolized, or broken down in the body. That happens at a consistent rate of about a third of an ounce per hour.

You can always drink too much, whether you’re drinking shots or piña coladas with little umbrellas on the side.

The Law of Averages

How drinking affects health & nutrition

A.D.I.N. Publication by Christina Dye

This is one in a series of publications on drugs, behavior, and health published by Do It Now Foundation. Please call or write for a list of current titles, or visit our website at www.doitnow.org.

Do It Now Foundation
Box 27568 ■ Tempe, AZ 85285-7568 ■ 480.736.0599

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Alcohol is a complex drug, the only one we know of that’s both fat- and water-soluble, and one which affects all the organs and tissues of the body.

An Ounce of Prevention

Unfortunately, there’s not a lot you can do to keep your body in perfect biochemical condition if you choose to drink.

That’s because alcohol is a complex drug, the only one we know of that’s both fat- and water-soluble, and one which affects all the organs and tissues of the body.

In fact, recent research has linked alcohol with a higher rate of tumors of the breast, liver, and mouth, along with an added susceptibility to high blood pressure.

And experts increasingly warn against drinking during pregnancy, since even one or two drinks per week have been linked with a higher risk of stillbirth and miscarriage.

The old adage has never seemed truer. Because an ounce of prevention really is worth a pound (or is it a gallon?) of cure.

Still, if you do drink (and you plan to keep on drinking) and you want to stay as healthy as possible, drink moderately.

Also, become aware of your diet and the way that foods (and drinking) affect your mood. Follow up by making a commitment to reduce your intake of junk food, fats, and excess sugar. And follow through by setting up (and sticking to) an exercise program.

That’s the best way we know to have your cocktail and drink it, too—hopefully, to a ripe old age.

You Are What You Drink...

One of the biggest hidden problems in drinking involves the tendency of booze to drain the body’s stores of critical vitamins and nutrients.

And while some of the problems arising from a vitamin deficiency can be reversed with daily doses of supplements, others can’t be turned around as easily, particularly when they’re undetected or untreated.

Let’s consider some of the most common:

- **B Vitamins.** Alcohol depletes supplies of B-complex vitamins, which are essential to basic body processes. Vitamin B deficiencies can harm the heart, liver, and other organs and damage muscle and nerve tissues, anemia, even beriberi (a disease involving nerve degeneration, muscle weakness, and heart problems).
- **Vitamin A.** Carotene (vitamin A) deficiency reduces the body’s resistance to disease and impairs vision, particularly the ability of the eyes to adjust to darkness.
- **Vitamin C.** Alcohol also blocks the body’s absorption of vitamin C, and can lead to anemia, reduced resistance to disease, and overstimulation of the adrenal gland.

And alcohol’s interference with essential nutrients carries a double whammy: Not only does it drain vitamins already in the body, it also slows absorption and retention of new nutrients. One-a-day, anyone?!