



Alcohol: what's your 'tipping point'?

That extra glass could be seriously scuppering your slimming campaign. Here's how to enjoy a drink and stay on the weight-loss wagon

What's your favourite way of relaxing? If it's curling up on the sofa with a glass of chilled Chardonnay, you're not alone. Alcohol has become our number-one treat of choice, whether it's a glass or two of wine at the end of the day, or a few rounds on a night out with friends. But have you ever stopped to think about how drinking alcohol affects your weight?

According to new Slimming World research carried out with YouGov, many of us have a drinking 'tipping point'. Go past it and your food consumption rockets for the next 24 hours, resulting on average in a whopping 6,300 extra calories on top of your normal daily intake. And what's shocking is that the tipping point tends to occur at approximately 10.5 units of alcohol for men (equivalent to four pints

of beer) and just 8 units for women (which works out at around 2½ glasses of wine).

Our survey found that approximately half of drinkers say they have a tipping point, and passing this point changes both how much they eat and their food choices. As well as consuming on average an extra 2,829 calories in food and 1,476 calories in alcohol on the same day, they may also take in another 2,051 extra calories in food the following day. And as if 6,300 unwanted calories wasn't enough, half of those surveyed also said they skipped any planned activity and were more likely to watch TV, stay in bed or spend time on social media the day after passing their tipping point.

'As well as containing calories that don't fill us up in the way food does, alcohol often makes us want to eat more and weakens our resolve to make

healthy choices,' says Dr Jacquie Lavin, Slimming World's head of research and nutrition. So grazing on snacks such as crisps and nuts, or tucking into a late-night takeaway, is hard to resist, even if you've already eaten dinner earlier on. And with the average tipping point coming at only a few drinks, it's very easy to find yourself in this weight-gain danger zone.

Doing the maths

As a guide, the energy imbalance caused by taking in 6,300 extra calories and by burning off fewer calories could equal a gain of around 2lbs per week, which you would then have to lose simply to stay at your current weight (before you do it all again!). Plus, given that 58 per cent of us pass our tipping point every weekend, alcohol consumption could be a major factor behind the country's increasing

weight problem. Statistics show that Britain has a higher proportion of binge drinkers than any other European country – is it a coincidence that we also top the charts for obesity?

Morning-after blues

Getting back on track the next day can be difficult, too, partly because alcohol uses up the body's store of glycogen, an important energy source kept in the liver. Without this store of energy on call next morning, you wake up with low blood sugar levels, so you feel hungry. 'When you have a hangover, you naturally crave carbohydrates or fatty foods,' says Dr Frankie Phillips from The British Dietetic Association (bda.uk.com). 'Alcohol can also leave you dehydrated the next day and many of us mistake thirst for hunger.'

Too much booze can also stop you sleeping properly, leaving you feeling tired the next day. We now know that missing out on sleep can affect levels of the hormones that regulate appetite, leaving you feeling hungrier than normal. And lack of energy can take its toll on your motivation to Food Optimise, so it's all too easy to swap your usual healthy breakfast for a greasy fry-up.

It's not just our waistlines that are affected by too much booze. Regularly drinking more than two to three units a day raises your risk of health problems now *and* in the future, says Emily Robinson, director of campaigns at Alcohol Concern (alcoholconcern.org.uk). 'We're seeing an

increase in alcohol-related health problems in 50 and 60 year olds as a result of decades of steady drinking. People are still unaware that drinking too much does more than damage your liver – one of our recent surveys found 86 per cent didn't know that alcohol raises your risk of several cancers.'

Part of the problem is that the way we drink has changed over the past 50 years and, as a result, we are drinking far more than we used to – especially women. 'Previous generations would go to a pub to have a drink, so it was an event that took some effort,' adds Emily Robinson. 'Now, we tend to stock up at our weekly supermarket shop, so there's always →

The sobering facts

Cut down on drink and you also cut your risk of developing all these serious health conditions:

- **Cancer** According to Cancer Research UK, our increased alcohol intake is one of the reasons why several cancers are on the increase. Cut back on the booze and you will reduce your risk of cancers including breast, bowel and liver.
- **Diabetes** Excessive alcohol can reduce your body's sensitivity to insulin, which increases the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.
- **Heart disease** Consume too much alcohol and it raises your blood pressure, and therefore the risk of heart disease and stroke.
- **Fatty liver disease** Drinking too much also causes a build-up of fat cells in the organ, which is the first stage of permanent liver damage, such as cirrhosis.
- **Irritable bowel syndrome** Cutting back on drinking can help relieve a whole raft of digestive problems such as IBS and gastritis.
- **Mental health problems** Alcohol is a known depressant, so it's no surprise that drinking too much has been shown to increase your risk of depression and anxiety. Cut down on the alcohol and you also reduce your risk of developing dementia.

How much is too much?

When you do indulge, stay inside the Government's lower risk guidelines for alcohol consumption: women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units daily and men should not regularly drink more than 3-4 units a day. 'Regularly' means every day or most days of the week. Here's how many units, calories and Syns there are in your favourite drinks:

Drink	Glass/bottle size	Alcohol units	Syns
Champagne	175ml	2.1	6
White wine	125ml	1.5	4
White wine	175ml	2.1	6
White wine	250ml	3	8
Red wine	125ml	1.6	4.5
Red wine	175ml	2.2	6
Red wine	250ml	3.1	8.5
Lager	330ml	1.72	7
Magners cider	440ml	2	9.5
Smirnoff Ice	275ml	1.4	9
Gin and low-cal mixer	35ml	1.3	4
WKD	275ml	1.1	11
Baileys	50ml	0.8	8

With thanks to drinkaware.co.uk

booze flash

something on hand. And we know that when you self-pour drinks, it's easier to consume far more than you intended.'

Raise a glass

As few of us could imagine a booze-free life – and there's no denying the pleasure of relaxing over a glass of wine with friends – what's the secret to enjoying a drink without hitting the tipping point? 'Making sure you know the Syn value of your favourite tipple is crucial, and on days you do drink, always plan it in to your Syns allowance,' says Jacquie Lavin. 'If you've got a big night out ahead, decide how many drinks you're going to have and stick to your plan. You could alternate alcoholic drinks with low-calorie soft drinks, opt for spritzers made with diet mixers, and match each glass of wine with one of water if you're having a meal.'

Members tell us that enjoying a filling Food Optimising meal before they head out helps them stave off hunger and steer clear of the resulting late-night unplanned takeaways. Preparing a healthy 'fakeaway' recipe to heat up when you get home can also help you skip a trip to the chip shop or curry house, and planning a 'morning-after breakfast' with lots of Free Foods is another clever way to stay on track.

In fact, many members find that their drinking habits naturally change after joining Slimming World, and 86 per cent say they now drink more moderately. 'They don't feel they're missing out because cutting back brings so many positive benefits,' says Jacquie. 'Feeling in control of your drinking can increase self-esteem and help you feel in control of your life in general. And most people also find their energy levels go up, which means they're less affected by stress and are more likely to feel like being active.' It's official: taking an honest look at your drinking really can have huge benefits for both your weight loss and your future health.

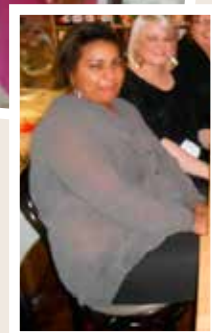
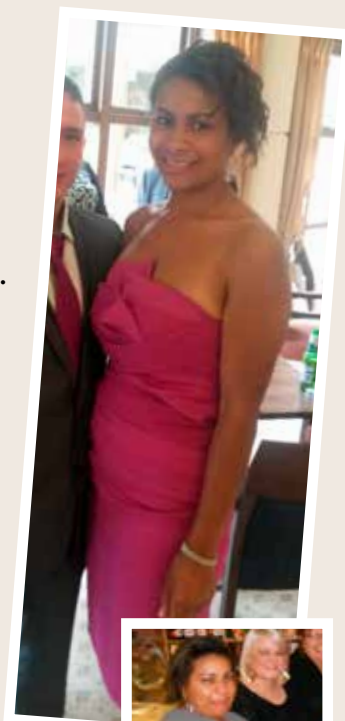
What's your tipping point?

To find your own tipping point – how many extra calories you're consuming as a result of alcohol and how much weight you could gain in a year – take the quiz at slimmingworld.com/tipping-point

'Streamlining my cocktails helped me lose 4½st'

Rachel Jeffers, 29, lives in Wakefield, West Yorkshire. She lost 4st 7½lbs at Chantal Shires' Slimming World group in Wakefield

'Before I lost weight, I loved creamy cocktails and would go to girls' night at a local pub where you paid £10 for unlimited drinks! Those evenings would end with a kebab on the way home, or toast with treacle when I got in, and the next day I'd eat anything I could get my hands on as I battled through my hangover. A work colleague lost a lot of weight with Slimming World, so I called up two of my friends and we joined together. Since losing weight, I still enjoy a drink and I can honestly say my social life is better than ever – it's just that alcohol isn't top of my list any more. I enjoy feeling slim and healthy and don't want to waste a day feeling hung over, so I'll stick to a couple of Malibu and diet colas, or a low-Syn cocktail. When I hold Slimming World girls' nights at my house, I make a Syn-free, non-alcoholic summery drink from diet lemonade, balsamic vinegar and lots of strawberries and cucumber. It looks and tastes like a treat, so I don't feel I'm missing out.'



8 ways to break the booze habit

PLAN YOUR DRINKS

If you have a big night ahead, decide in advance how much alcohol you're going to have, and how you'll pace your consumption over the evening.

STOCK UP ON LOW-SYN ALTERNATIVES

The sugar-free soft drinks market has expanded in recent years, so you can enjoy a range of Syn-free flavours that go way beyond lemonade.

THINK LONG

If you like wine, switch to spritzers to make your drinks last longer. Opt for shandy if you drink lager, for a lower alcohol content (and if you use low-cal lemonade, fewer calories, too).

HAVE A BOOZE-FREE MONTH

It's a great way to break a regular drinking habit. Cancer Research UK runs its Dryathlon in January, or start now and support WaterAid by taking part in OctSober.

CROSS IT OFF YOUR LIST

Cut wine out of your weekly supermarket shop and only buy it when you need it. An alcohol-free night is a lot easier if there's no chilled bottle of wine in the fridge.

MAKE SOME DAYS ALCOHOL FREE

Aim for a minimum of three 'AFDs' a week, ideally on consecutive days to give your liver a break.

DOWNSIZE YOUR GLASS

Trendy bucket-sized glasses encourage overdrinking, so opt for 125ml or 175ml glasses at home.

FILL UP, THEN GO OUT

Beat hunger with lots of Free Foods before you start on the wine, so you're not drinking on an empty stomach.