New Year, New Habits

Dr. Charles Shaffer

If you haven't already guessed, there is a link and association between obesity and alcohol consumption. This link can be found and proven in many medical studies and literature. Every year during February, patients ask what the best alcoholic beverage is, if any, so they can partake in the holiday and still not gain weight.

The answer to their question is a bit complicated. The research on the association between obesity and alcohol has produced slightly inconsistent results. However, new data has proven the consumption of alcohol directly correlates to weight gain; although more recent literature found that alcohol consumption consists of two components: the quantity and the frequency of the consumed beverage.
It certainly is not as simple as we first thought. The relationship between alcohol and weight gain becomes much more complicated once you dive into it.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE:

Biochemistry is the true reason why drinking alcohol can make it difficult to lose weight. Your hereditary, choice of alcoholic beverage, and high caloric foods you ingest while drinking all play a large factor.

The calorie content of your preferred beverage poses a problem for your waistline because of the other things you choose to consume. Calories from pasta are more likely to be stored around your abdomen, which is seen more in men than women. In fact, estrogen, a female hormone, suppresses fat around the midline until a woman is middle-aged. As menopause approaches, estrogen levels fall which causes alcohol to store fat around the waist.

Men are able to develop 'beer bellies' at any given age due to having low estrogen levels. Alcohol also impairs the work of glucagon, which is the hormone that works to increase blood glucose levels naturally and breaks down body fat. The human body recognizes alcohol as a poison, so the liver makes a point to rid of the substance before doing any other job. This means glucagon is no longer being produced and fat is not being broken down.

It is wise to avoid beer if you want to lose weight. Dr. Westman warns there are more carbs in grains than alcohol. Similarly, spirits and the standard glass of wine contain up to 4g of carbohydrates.

A study conducted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) found that individuals who drank the smallest quantity of alcohol also had the lowest BMIs. In comparison, those who drank with significant frequency had the highest BMIs overall.

Dr. Ressly conducts her research by using different methods of assessing alcohol consumption than previously used methods in earlier studies. She believes alcohol consumption consists of two components: the quantity of alcohol consumed and the frequency of alcohol consumed. Previous studies examined drinking based on the average volume consumed over a limited amount of time. Dr. Ressly's studies use a broader scope and does not limit itself to a small, specified period of time.

Some studies indicate the type of alcohol consumed may be a factor in whether or not an individual experiences weight gain. A glass of wine does not seem to impact weight as much as grains, beer, and vodka might.

For example, Dr. Westman's study found that light to moderate wine consumption was somewhat protective of weight gain, while whiskey, bourbon, and scotch positively associated themselves with weight gain.

In 2011, researches at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis published one of the most critical studies on the link between obesity and alcohol/alcoholism. They looked at data from two extensive surveys: one from the National Longitudinal Alcohol Study (1991-1992) and another from the National Epidemiological Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (2001-2002). In all, 80,000 individuals participated in the surveys.

After controlling for other factors, it was found that individuals with a family history of alcoholism had a greater chance of being affected by obesity. This was especially true for women, who had a 49% greater chance. One possible explanation is that in trying to avoid the alcoholic behaviors observed in their families, people replaced alcohol with a different addiction. This was uncovered in the second, more recent survey.

The first survey found no link between obesity and a family history of alcoholism. The fact the link strengthened as much as it did in a relatively short period of time suggests environmental factors were involved. The factors could be the increase in sentry times, the prevalence of fatty and sugary foods, and reduced access to healthy options and activities.

The researchers' comments in their publication in the Archives of General Psychology are telling. They focused on environmental changes and suggested obesity may be rising in those vulnerable to addiction, due to the increased access of "highly palatable foods".

Be sure to always have a plan set it in place. This way, you are prepared and cannot sabotage yourself. As always, if you ever need encouragement or have questions, please talk to us as we are here to help.

Happy Valentine's Day and Blessings,
Chuck Shaffer MD

The Recipe of the Month

Berry Mousse (Makes 8 servings, 1 fruit/serving)

Ingredients

- 1/4 C boiling water
- 1/3 package unflavored gelatin
- 1 C heavy whipping cream
- 4 packets Truvia
- 2 C berries of choice, pureed in blender
- 1 package strawberries

Directions

Blend 2 cups berries in a blender and mix until pureed; set aside. Pour boiling water on gelatin in cooking pot and allow to boil until gelatin is dissolved.

Beat heavy whipping cream and Truvia in chilled large bowl on high speed until stiff, while adding gelatin. Continue to add berry puree to whipped cream. Refrigerate about 3 hours until served. To serve, dollop 2 tablespoons mousse over 3 large strawberries.

Enjoy!