December 17, 2015  
**Release Date:** December 23, 2015  

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, FAND  
Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences  

**TOAST TO YOUR HEALTH!**

The holiday season is filled with opportunities to drink, or not drink, alcoholic beverages. Making sensible choices often involves consideration of legal, nutritional, safety, cultural, and religious issues. While responsible drinking is crucial all year round, now is a good time to examine the role of alcohol in the diet.

The United States Department of Agriculture Dietary Guidelines states “If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.” Moderation is defined as one drink per day for women, and two for men.

What constitutes “a drink?” The quantity varies depending on the type of alcohol consumed. One drink equals 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of regular beer, or 1-1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. It is important to note that “light” beer does not refer to a reduced alcohol content but rather a lower caloric content.

For legal and safety reasons, some should not drink at all. Underage children and teens (the legal drinking age in Maryland is 21) and women who are or may become pregnant should not consume alcohol. People on certain medications or anyone planning to drive or operate machinery should also stay away from alcohol. Individuals who are predisposed to alcoholism and unable to control their intake should not drink.

Alcohol can effect weight management. Delivering 7 calories per gram, it is more calorie-dense than carbohydrates (4 calories per gram) but less than fat (9 calories per gram). Thus, alcoholic beverages can contain significant calories: 150 calories in 12 ounces of beer, 100 calories in 5 ounces of wine, and 100 calories in a “shot” of distilled spirits. This does not include any mixers that may also be contained in the beverage.

Drinking alcohol may also lead to additional food calories. High-fat, high-calorie foods, like nuts, chips, and hors d’oeuvres are often consumed along with alcoholic beverages. Portion control may be more difficult to achieve when inhibitions are lowered by alcohol.

No safe level of alcohol has been established for pregnancy. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, the leading cause of mental retardation in the Western world, is found in children of women who...
consume large amounts of alcohol during pregnancy. It is a birth defect that is entirely preventable. Thus, avoiding alcohol is crucial not only for pregnant women but also for all women who may become pregnant.

Alcohol can alter the effectiveness or toxicity of many medications. Some medications may increase blood alcohol levels. If you take medications, ask your physician or pharmacist for advice on alcohol intake. This is especially true for older adults.

Whether you are the host or guest of a holiday party, you can take steps to moderate drinking. Offer non-alcoholic seasonal beverages such as hot spiced cider, or nonalcoholic eggnog or wassail. Fruit juice punch and sparkling water are also good choices. Mix club soda with 2 ounces of dry wine to make a spritzer. This allows you to “stretch” one drink into two.

Alcohol-containing beverages can add flavor to foods in cooking. If you enjoy the taste but want to avoid the alcohol, consider using extracts. The following recipe illustrates how rum and brandy extract keep a holiday treat flavorful yet safe. Be sure to use pasteurized frozen eggs, NOT fresh eggs, to avoid salmonella poisoning.

**HOLIDAY EGGNOG**

Serves 10

2-1/3 cups 2% low-fat milk
8 ounces pasteurized frozen egg substitute, partially thawed
1/4 cup nonfat dry milk
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon rum flavoring or extract
1/2 teaspoon brandy extract
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
6 ice cubes
Nutmeg for garnish (optional)

Combine first 8 ingredients (milk through ice cubes) in a blender; process until smooth. Pour into small glasses; sprinkle with additional nutmeg, if desired. Serve immediately.

For more information about the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County Office check out our website http://extension.umd.edu/frederick-county

University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all persons and will not discriminate against anyone because of race, age, sex, color, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, religion, ancestry, or national origin, marital status, genetic information, or political affiliation, or gender identity and expression.

Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, FAND, is a licensed Registered Dietitian, Fellow of the Academy of Nutrition Dietetics, and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences.

DHR:ls