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A TOAST TO YOUR HEALTH

All throughout the year I focus on nutritious food choices for good health. At this time of year especially, our decisions are not only food choices, but beverage choices. Endless opportunities arise to drink, or not to drink, alcohol….eggnog, mulled wine, champagne, beer, mixed drinks, shots, cordials, Irish coffee, after dinner drinks, and night caps.

Alcohol can pack on the pounds quickly and because nutrition labeling is not required on alcoholic beverages then most drinkers are clueless about calorie content. A once a week happy hour tradition can easily translate into an extra pound a month. You can’t understand when your clothes get tight because you haven’t chewed a single bite of extra food. It might be the drinking! Below are the facts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beverage</th>
<th>Serving size in ounces</th>
<th>Calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Beer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Beer</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Champagne</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distilled spirits (80 proof)</td>
<td>1.5 oz.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy</td>
<td>1 shot (25 grams)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee liquor</td>
<td>1.5 oz.</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish crème</td>
<td>1.3 oz.</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are ways to enjoy the “spirits” without busting your calorie budget. Try the ever increasing variety of light beers. Marketed on LACK of calories, the calorie content will be “plastered” on the container, a suitable pun for the subject. If the beer is just for washing down your slice of pizza then consider a non-alcoholic beer which is naturally lower in calories.

For the wine lover, I suggest diluting it with seltzer water to add some bubbly. Low calorie wines are also available. Before you try this, do an inventory of the size of your wine glasses. I did and found the wine goblets I got for wedding gifts decades ago, contained exactly five ounces, the “official” serving size. The wine glasses I bought a few holidays ago held 15 ounces; three servings in one glass. It could be that you just need to use a smaller glass!
Distilled spirits like bourbon, gin, and vodka can be mixed with “diet” soft drinks, tonic water, sparkling waters, and lemonade. Another option is lower calorie juices like tomato, V8, and artificially sweetened fruit drinks which come in many flavors. These simple changes can cut calories by half or more.

Consumers are beginning to realize those drinks do add up and thus are asking for lighter options. Restaurants, who pump up their revenues by serving alcoholic drinks, are responding with “skinny cocktails.” To see what’s “pouring” visit the website www.caloriecount.about.com

Drinking has legal and safety ramifications and should be done responsibly. Some individuals should not drink at all – youth under the age of 21; women who are or may become pregnant; breastfeeding women; people on certain medications; and anyone who plans to drive or operate machinery.

Whenever discussing alcohol I am always wary that someone may think it is an endorsement to drink. It is not! For some it is a regular part of their diet, contributing significant calories, and thus needs addressing. Individuals who are predisposed to alcoholism and unable to control their intake should not drink. You can find information on prevention and treatment by The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration at http://www.samhsa.gov/

The USDA Dietary Guidelines suggest that Americans who choose to drink alcohol should do so in moderation. In this case, moderation is defined as one drink per day for women, and two for men. A drink is a 12-ounce beer, 5 ounce glass of wine, or 1 1/2 ounce of distilled spirits. These guidelines are not intended as an average over several days but rather the amount consumed on any single day. Thus you do not get to save up your drinks for the week and have them all on the weekend!

Make a toast to your health as you end 2012 and choose sensible beverage choices. Here are a few recipes for Festive Holiday Beverages without the alcohol

**PEPPERMINT EGGNOG PUNCH**

1 quart peppermint ice cream, softened  
1 quart commercial dairy eggnog  
4 (12 ounce) bottles ginger ale, chilled  
Peppermint sticks

Combine first three ingredients in punch bowl. Stir until blended. Serve immediately with peppermint sticks. Makes 4 1/2 quarts.
BY THE MUG: MULLED CIDER

1-2 whole allspice
1-2 whole cloves
1/2 stick cinnamon
1 teaspoon brown sugar (or brown sugar substitute to taste)
Apple Cider to fill mug

Tie spices in a cheesecloth or muslin square of fabric. Put cider, sugar, and spice bag in a saucepan and bring slowly to a boil. Simmer for a minute or two. Remove spice bag, pour into mug and enjoy.

MOCK CHAMPAGNE

2 (1 liter) bottles ginger ale, chilled
46 ounce can pineapple juice, chilled
64 ounce bottle white grape juice, chilled

To make Ice ring: Fill a ring mold with ½ inch of ginger ale. Arrange fruit in bottom of mold, if desired. Freeze until set (this step anchors fruit, prevents floating.) Fill with the rest of the bottle of ginger ale and freeze until solid (overnight). To unmold, dip in warm water. Place in punch bowl just before serving.

In a large punch bowl, combine pineapple juice, white grape juice and remaining bottle of ginger ale; blend well. Add ice ring just before serving.

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