Milk + Alcohol: Does a body good? [1]

Dear Alice,

If someone drinks milk before consuming alcohol, will it help you from getting drunk by "coating your stomach"? Why or why not?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Part of drinking responsibly is becoming familiar with the myths and facts about consuming alcohol. It is commonly believed that having milk or something greasy will coat the stomach and prevent you from getting drunk. While this is not true, having eaten prior to or while drinking alcohol slows the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream (though only slows absorption a little). It's actually a good idea to have food in your stomach before and while you are drinking.

So, why doesn't "coating the stomach" prevent someone from becoming drunk? Quite simply, the body absorbs alcohol before it absorbs other nutrients (such as the proteins and fats in that glass of milk). So, even if you drink as much milk as your heart desires before the alcohol, your body will still absorb the alcohol before the milk. Preferential absorption? Perhaps. It's probably also important to note that about 80 percent of the alcohol absorption into a person's system happens in the small intestine, so "coating the stomach" really wouldn't help much.

Keep in mind that it typically takes the liver an hour to metabolize the alcohol in twelve ounces of beer, four to five ounces of wine, or one and a half ounces of 80-proof drinks. If drinking on an empty stomach, a person may seem to feel the effects of alcohol faster, but the alcohol can also irritate the stomach. Part of the recommendation around drinking one drink per hour is to avoid uncomfortable experiences when consuming alcohol (such as upset stomach, vomiting, etc.).

If you're planning for a night of drinking but don't want to get drunk, there are a variety of options for slowing the rate of alcohol absorption. These include spacing alcohol intake by drinking non-alcoholic drinks (did anyone say milk?) in between alcoholic drinks; staying active (don't just sit and drink the night away); and eating protein-rich foods, (i.e., meat, cheese) before and while drinking. Still, even when the rate of alcohol absorption is decreased, the body will still absorb all of that alcohol eventually. Tips for drinking responsibly include:

- Drinking no more than one drink per hour
• Having less than four drinks (for women) and five drinks (for men) on a single drinking occasion
• Planning beforehand the number of drinks you will have
• Keeping track of your drinks to avoid going over your planned amount
• Avoiding drinking games
• Avoiding drinks whose ingredients are unknown to you
• Making plans beforehand for getting home
• Never driving after drinking (or getting into a car with someone who's been drinking)
• Never mixing alcohol with medications
• Never consuming a drink that’s been unattended

If you would like more information about drinking in moderation, or on the effects of alcohol in general, be sure to check out the responses in the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol and Other Drugs [2] archives. Knowing all you can about drinking alcohol is a great way of having fun and staying safe.

Cheers,

Alice!

Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [3]
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