

# Standard Drink Equivalence



DISTILLED SPIRITS COUNCIL  
OF THE UNITED STATES

According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, one standard drink or “drink equivalent” contains 0.6 ounces (14 grams) of pure alcohol.<sup>1</sup>

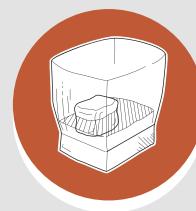
Ethanol is the pure alcohol that is in ALL beverage alcohol. Each of these standard drinks has the same type and amount of alcohol:



12 oz regular beer  
(5% ABV)



5 oz wine  
(12% ABV)



1.5 oz 80-proof  
distilled spirits  
(40% ABV)

## Alcohol is alcohol.

Whether it is in distilled spirits, wine, or beer, the effects of ethanol on the body are the same. According to the CDC, “*it is the amount of alcohol consumed that affects a person most, not the type.*”<sup>2</sup> Alcohol consumption is linked to some health risks and some potential benefits,\* and studies show that these associations are attributable to ethanol.

Public policy regarding beverage alcohol should not differentiate between distilled spirits, wine, and beer.

It sends the dangerous message that some forms of beverage alcohol are ‘safer’ than others.

## How do Canned Cocktails or Ready-to-Drink Beverages (RTDs) Equate to Standard Drinks?



Whether the RTD is spirit-, malt-, wine-, or sugar-based, only two pieces of information matter:  
1) ounces; and 2) % alcohol by volume [ABV].

To calculate how many standard drinks are in a container, multiply these two numbers, then divide by 0.6 (i.e., the ounces of ethanol in one standard drink). This works for all beverage alcohol – not just RTDs. Here are some real-world examples:

### Can A: 12 oz, 6.9% ABV

Wine-Based RTD

$$\frac{(12 \text{ oz} \times 0.069 \text{ ABV})}{0.6 \text{ oz}} = 1.38 \text{ standard drinks}$$

### Can B: 16 oz, 8.0% ABV

Malt-Based RTD

$$\frac{(16 \text{ oz} \times 0.080 \text{ ABV})}{0.6 \text{ oz}} = 2.13 \text{ standard drinks}$$

### Can C: 12 oz, 4.5% ABV

Spirits-Based RTD

$$\frac{(12 \text{ oz} \times 0.045 \text{ ABV})}{0.6 \text{ oz}} = 0.90 \text{ standard drinks}$$

\* No one should start drinking for potential health benefits. Some individuals should not drink at all. Alcohol abuse can cause serious health and other problems. Even drinking in moderation may pose risks for some people. Individuals should discuss alcohol consumption with their physician who can determine what is best based on individual factors, such as family history, genetics, and lifestyle.

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The concept of standard drink equivalence is used by experts from around the world and in the U.S.

The organizations listed below, which include federal agencies, as well as health and safety organizations, are examples of organizations that employ standard drink equivalence.

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau (TTB)
- American Medical Women's Association (AMWA)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research (MFMER)
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)
- National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)
- U.S. Defense Department (DOD), Defense Health Agency (DHA)
- U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

Understanding drink equivalence and knowing the definition of a standard drink is an important aspect of moderate and responsible alcohol consumption.

The *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* defines moderate consumption as up to two drinks per day for males or up to one per day for females and states that there are some people who should not consume alcohol at all. To be both science-based and effective, policies and programs must utilize standard drink equivalence and should encourage those who choose to drink to do so responsibly and in moderation.

**The bottom line: there is no beverage of moderation, only the practice of moderation.**

To learn more, please visit:

[drinkinmoderation.org](http://drinkinmoderation.org)



<sup>1</sup> [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov) <sup>2</sup> [www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/alcohol/faqs.htm)