

# How Many Calories in That Margarita?



A look at  
the best—  
and worst—  
beverages for  
you in terms of  
calorie count



PHOTOS BY ERIK KELLAR

**You're careful about what you eat all week and get in a good workout most days. Then, on Friday night, you decide to splurge a little and order a margarita. Did you know that drink clocks in at about 750 calories? That's roughly the same as 5 and a half Twinkies.**

Or maybe Saturday morning you order yourself a mocha Frappuccino at the coffee shop. Even without the whipped cream, a small 12-ounce drink will add 210 calories to your daily total. For that much, you could have had three chocolate chip cookies.

"For many Americans, 20 percent of their calories come from beverages," says Diana Vitorio, R.D., of the von Arx Diabetes and Nutrition Health Center. If you're trying to cut calories—which many of us are—that's an obvious place to start. So what should we drink?

### **A Healthy Ranking**

In recent years, a group of six nutrition experts from across the U.S. formed an independent group called the Independent Beverage Guidance Panel. They reviewed the evidence on beverages and health and ranked them into six levels based on calories, nutrition, and overall evidence of positive and negative effects. They published their findings in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in March 2006. Let's take a look at what they came up with:

**Water.** It will probably come as no surprise that water (carbonated or not) was the big winner as the best beverage overall. It provides everything your body needs to restore lost fluids. And tap water costs less than a penny per glass. Your body would be perfectly happy if water were the only beverage you reached for throughout the day.

How much water should you drink each day?

There is actually little evidence to support the well-worn "eight glasses" recommendation, but the Institute of Medicine has put forth some daily guidelines: "Adequate intake" for men is 125 ounces (or 15 cups). For women it is 91 ounces (or 11 cups). Some of this comes from food, but about 80 percent of it should come from beverages and, ideally, water.

**Tea and coffee.** Coming in second to water as the most healthful beverages are tea and coffee. With nothing added to them, they have 0 calories and are full of healthy elements such as flavonoids and antioxidants. Coffee may help protect against Type 2 diabetes, and green tea may help protect against heart disease. Pregnant women should probably limit their caffeinated beverages to one per day, but other than that, these are pretty benign choices on the whole. Until, that is, we start adding sugar, flavorings and cream—whipped or otherwise. That's when coffee drinks can get to be as caloric as an entire meal, with none of the nutrients and a whole lot more sugar and fat. They are known as adult milkshakes because they are just as damaging as the drinkable dessert. [See the box on p. 19 for tips for healthiest ordering.]

**Low-fat, skim-milk and soy beverages.** Because even low-fat milk can be high in calories, and large amounts may increase risk of prostate and ovarian cancer, it's best for adults to limit milk (and all dairy products) to a glass or two a day. Less than that is OK as long as you are getting calcium from other sources. Low-fat and skim milk are the

### **NOT SO SWEET**

Sweeteners that add calories to drinks go by many names. Look for—and avoid—these ingredients.

- High-fructose corn syrup
- Fructose
- Fruit Juice concentrate
- Honey
- Sugar
- Syrup
- Corn syrup
- Sucrose
- Dextrose

## BELLY UP TO THE BAR?

Take a look at these calorie contents before ordering your go-to drink out.

### Cocktails

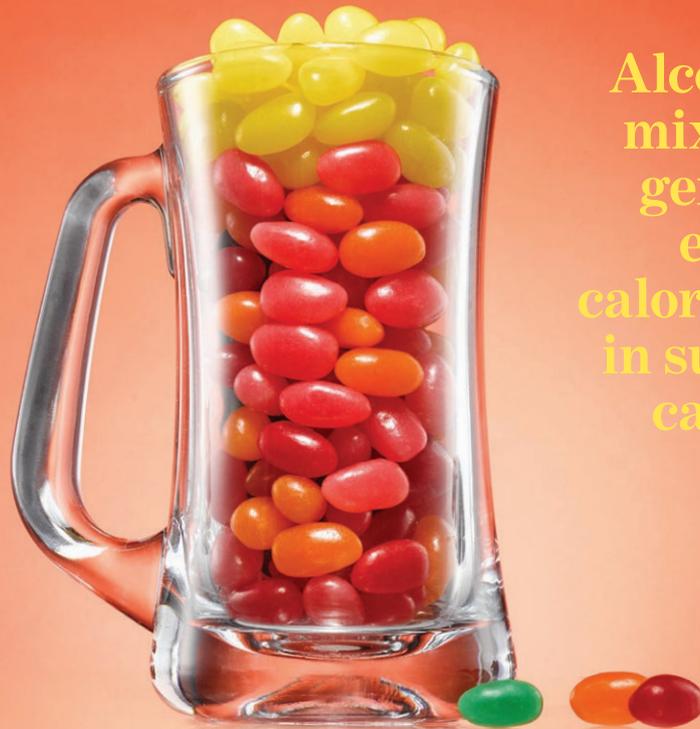
Bloody mary,	10 oz.	125
Mojito, 8 oz.		242
Martini, 4 oz.		275
Pina Colada,	12 oz.	655
Daiquiri, 12 oz.		675
Margarita,	12 oz.	750

### Beer

All 12 oz.	
Budweiser	153
Bud Light	110
Coors	142
Coors Light	102
Sam Adams Lager/Ale	160
Sam Adams Light	124

### Wine and Champagne

All 4 oz.	
Cabernet sauvignon	90
Chianti	100
Sauvignon blanc	80
Chablis	85
Dry champagne	105
Pink champagne	100



Alcohol and mixers are generally empty calories—high in sugar and calories.

best choices because they contain less saturated fat than whole milk. Fortified soy milk is a good source of calcium and vitamin D for people who don't like cow's milk.

**Non-calorically sweetened beverages.** "Diet" drinks are not a great choice—they beat out sugary soft drinks only because they are lower in calories. But they have been shown to contribute to weight gain and certainly may have other unhealthy effects. They should be only an occasional drink, if at all, and not as a daily beverage.

**Caloric beverages with some nutrients.** Be careful with this category, as its members have pluses and minuses. Fruit juice has nutrients, but not the fiber of the fruit itself and usually many more calories. Fruit smoothies, very high in calories, are not recommended as daily beverages. Vegetable juice is often loaded with sodium. Sports drinks are not necessary unless you are an endurance athlete, and they generally have as many calories as a sugary soda. You don't need a vitamin-enhanced water if you take a daily multivitamin. Some types of alcohol may benefit some and harm others. And the mixers that go with them are generally empty calories—high in sugar and calories.

**Calorically sweetened beverages.** Sweetened beverages get a big thumbs-down from the Beverage Guidance Panel. In addition to sugary soda, this

includes lemonade, energy drinks and fruit drinks. They are chock-full of calories and mostly have no other nutrients. Drinking them regularly can contribute to Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

### What Would You Like to Drink?

The Beverage Guidance Panel has concrete suggestions for how to get your beverage intake in line as part of a healthy lifestyle.

- Water may not comprise your entire day's fluid, but make sure it makes up at least half of it. If you need 12 cups of liquid a day, that means 6 should be water.
- About a third of your beverage intake can be unsweetened coffee or tea. If you add sugar or cream, drinking less would help with weight management.
- Two glasses of low-fat milk per day is acceptable. If you drink less than that, make sure you are getting calcium from other sources.
- Limit alcoholic drinks to no more than one or two per day for men and no more than one per day for women.
- Ideally, don't have any drinks made with artificial sweeteners, except as a rare treat.
- The same goes for drinks sweetened with sugar or high-fructose corn syrup—ideally they should be limited to rare treats.

Cheers! **NH**

## WHAT TO ORDER

Follow these tips for the healthiest options.

### At the smoothie stand:

- Check nutritional information and choose the one with the lowest calories.
- Order a child's size if possible.
- Many smoothies are made with added sugar. Ask them to hold yours. The fruit is plenty sweet enough.

### At the coffee shop:

- Ask for fat-free or low-fat milk in your drink.
- Order the smallest size.
- Skip the flavored syrups. They are loaded with sugar.
- Skip the whipped cream. It's loaded with sugar and fat.
- Keep it simple: A plain cup of black coffee is completely calorie-free.

