Dear Alice,

Do different kinds of alcohol (specifically liquor) actually make you different kinds of drunk? Or is it a cultural/psychological thing? I've noticed that I feel different when drinking wine vs. vodka vs. tequila, and I'm wondering if there's a physiological reason.

Answer

Dear Reader,

The experience of being intoxicated or “getting drunk?” is rather subjective. There is no major research that supports the popular myth that different types of alcohol evoke different feelings while intoxicated. Instead, serving size, speed of consumption, and the number of drinks consumed have a greater effect on your “kind of drunk?” than the type of alcoholic beverage itself.

Intoxication occurs when alcohol passes from the stomach and intestines to the blood, a process called absorption. While all types of ingested alcohol are eventually absorbed, the rate of absorption is determined by factors such as gender, body weight, type of alcohol, full or empty stomach, speed of consumption, and the use of medications or other drugs in your system. To prevent over-consumption of alcohol, a person needs to absorb less alcohol than s/he metabolizes. For most people, the liver metabolizes approximately one drink per hour. The human body can process 1 to 1.5 ounces of alcohol an hour, the amount contained in a single standard drink - 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. of wine, or 1.5 oz. of hard liquor. Keep in mind that many mixed drinks and alcoholic punches contain more or less liquor depending on the type of drink and the person doing the mixing.

As a cautionary note, keep in mind that the same drink served in two different settings may contain different amounts of alcohol? in fact, a cocktail presented as a singular drink may contain up to three times the standard amount of pure alcohol than a “standard” alcoholic beverage. If you’re unsure about the alcohol content of a certain drink, check out the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism’s [2] website for a drink size calculator along with detailed information and tips on how to maintain a healthy relationship with alcohol. If you want to know exactly how much alcohol you’re consuming, consider sticking to clearly labeled bottled alcoholic beverages.

If you are interested in exploring your drinking, you can talk to a counselor or a Substance Abuse Prevention Specialist to help you develop strategies for maintaining a healthy
relationship with alcohol and/or other drugs.

For more general information on alcohol, check out the Go Ask Alice! Alcohol and Other Drugs [3] archive. In the meantime, you can impress your friends and help dispel the myth of different types of drunk? at your next party.

Cheers,

Alice!

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