








What's a "standard" drink?

Many people are surprised to learn what counts as a drink. In the United States, a "standard" drink is any drink that contains about 0.6 fluid ounces or 14 grams of "pure" alcohol. Although the drinks below are different sizes, each contains approximately the same amount of alcohol and counts as a single standard drink.

12 fl oz of regular beer	=	8-9 fl oz of malt liquor (shown in a 12- oz glass)	=	5 fl oz of table wine	=	3-4 oz of fortified wine (such as sherry or port; 3.5 oz shown)	=	2-3 oz of cordial, liqueur, or aperitif (2.5 oz shown)	=	1.5 oz of brandy (a single jigger or shot)	=	1.5 fl oz shot of 80-proof spirits ("hard liquor")
												
about 5% alcohol		about 7% alcohol		about 12% alcohol		about 17% alcohol		about 24% alcohol		about 40% alcohol		about 40% alcohol

The percent of "pure" alcohol, expressed here as alcohol by volume (alc/vol), varies by beverage.

The examples above serve as a starting point for comparison. For different types of beer, wine, or malt liquor, the alcohol content can vary greatly. Some differences are smaller than you might expect, however. Many light beers, for example, have almost as much alcohol as regular beer—about 85% as much, or 4.2% versus 5.0% alcohol by volume (alc/vol), on average.

If you want to know the alcohol content of a canned or bottled beverage, start by checking the label. Not all beverages are required to list the alcohol content, so you may need to search online for a reliable source of information, such as the bottler's Web site. For fact sheets about how to read wine, malt beverage, and distilled spirits labels, visit the consumer corner of the [U.S. Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau](http://www.fda.gov/oc/ohrt/).

Although the "standard" drink amounts are helpful for following health guidelines, they may not reflect customary serving sizes. For example, a single mixed drink made with hard liquor can contain 1 to 3 or more standard drinks, depending on the type of spirits and the recipe. If you want to estimate the alcohol content of a cocktail, try this [calculator](#).

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