

# Alcohol Awareness Initiative

Those who drink alcohol beverages should do so sensibly and in moderation" is the key message regarding alcohol consumption from the recently published Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. The Guidelines also emphasize that "the consumption of alcohol can have beneficial or harmful effects depending on the amount consumed, age and other characteristics of the person consuming the alcohol and the specifics of the situation." Some individuals should not drink at all.

In addition to monitoring the amount of alcohol consumed, a key aspect of responsible drinking is understanding the definition of a standard drink. A standard drink is defined as 12 fluid ounces of regular beer, 5 fluid ounces of wine and 1.5 fluid ounces of 80 proof distilled spirits. Each standard drink contains 0.6 fluid ounces of alcohol.

This standard drink definition is used by such authoritative sources as the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI), as well as by state driver's manuals and consumer organizations, such as Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD).

In a 2005 AMWA survey, 95% of survey respondents said that it is important that people understand the federal government's definition of a standard drink to guide responsible decisions about drinking. Yet, 80% believe their patients don't know that each standard drink contains the same amount of alcohol (0.6 fluid ounces) and has the same physiological effect on the body. To review a detailed summary of survey findings, go to Standard Drink Survey Summary.

It is important that health care professionals talk to their patients about alcohol and responsible drinking. Studies suggest that patients who discuss alcohol consumption with their health care professionals are able to make the most informed decisions about moderate alcohol consumption or abstaining.

"Standard Drinks: A Teaching Tool," graphically illustrates standard drinks and can be found at [www.standarddrinks.com](http://www.standarddrinks.com). A resource to facilitate discussions on alcohol with patients, the "Educational Tool Kit on Beverage Alcohol Consumption and Standard Drinks: A Teaching Tool," is available at [www.alcoholtoolkit.org/discusOnline.html](http://www.alcoholtoolkit.org/discusOnline.html), and provides health professionals with tools to educate their patients about moderate alcohol consumption in an adult diet, as well as screening tools for alcohol abuse and resources for intervention and treatment.

The federal government's Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 is also an excellent resource for alcohol awareness. Consistent with past versions, the 2005 Guidelines define moderate drinking as up to two drinks per day for men and up to one drink per day for women, and include the definition of a standard drink. The Guidelines 2005 provide important information about alcohol's health effects, identifies individuals who should not drink, and describes specific situations in which alcohol should be avoided.