

SELF



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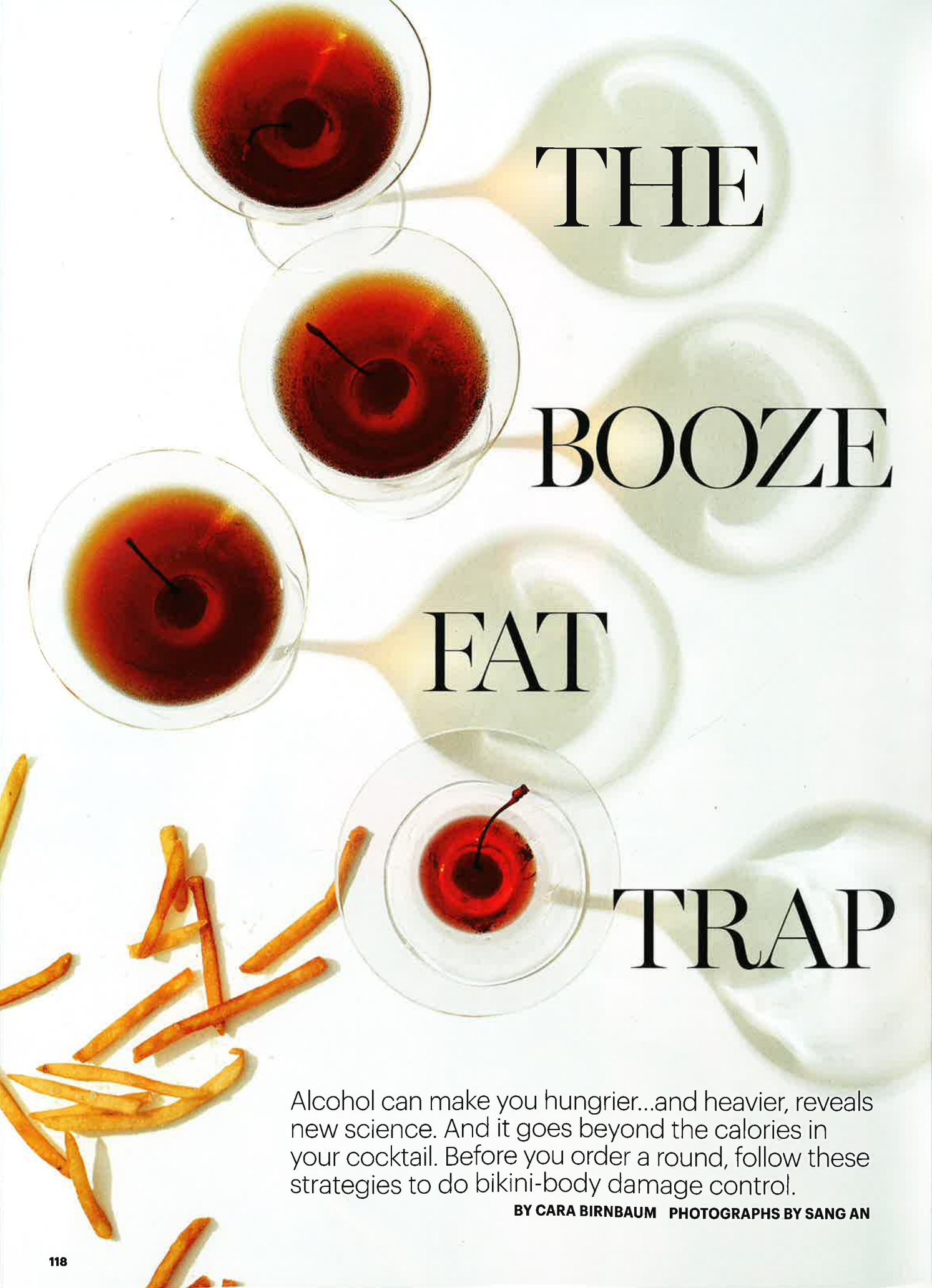


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The fitness benefits of caffeine



THE BOOZE

EAT

TRAP

Alcohol can make you hungrier...and heavier, reveals new science. And it goes beyond the calories in your cocktail. Before you order a round, follow these strategies to do bikini-body damage control.

BY CARA BIRNBAUM PHOTOGRAPHS BY SANG AN

5 sneaky ways booze makes you gain

When alcohol enters your body, it triggers a cascade of surprising (actually, let's just call them evil) reactions: Booze can cause you to eat more, and worse, store more calories as fat. But no need to give up a great evening—we have the plan to keep you drinking happily, but smartly, with your weight in check.

1

ALCOHOL TRIGGERS CRAVINGS—MAINLY FOR JUNK FOOD...

Your first drink starts a rush of feel-good endorphins in your brain, says a study in *Science Translational Medicine*. At the same time, it can also spark disco-fry cravings. "The neurocircuitry for the pleasure you get from alcohol and food overlaps," says study author Jennifer Mitchell, Ph.D., assistant professor of neurology at the University of California at San Francisco.

2

THEN IT MAKES YOU IMPULSIVE...

So you're battling disco-fry cravings, but now, shortly after that first sip, the alcohol in your brain slows activity in your rational prefrontal cortex. Your logic and willpower plummet, and you can't say no to snacks. Worse, if you sip more than one drink per hour, your liver can't metabolize the alcohol fast enough to keep up, leaving more booze—and junk food cravings—to wallop your brain.

3

AND LEADS YOU TO MISREAD YOUR BODY'S SIGNALS...

Just when you're too irrational to resist those apps, your body starts telling you it's hungry. Truth: It probably isn't. Alcohol lowers the level of hormones that help you retain water, making you dehydrated. "The thirst you feel can actually register as hunger," says Sharon Akabas, Ph.D., associate director of Columbia University's Institute of Human Nutrition.

Cut down your drink cals

Don't go frozen

Instead of a frozen margarita, which can pack more than 500 calories, ask for one on the rocks. "Frozen drinks can be up to three times the size of their regular counterparts," say Stephanie Clarke, R.D., and Willow Jarosh, R.D., SELF contributing experts. "Also, those slushy cocktails tend to be loaded with additional sugar."

CALORIES SAVED 250 per drink

Declutter your cocktail

Skip the Long Island iced tea—which can run up to 350 calories or more and include five kinds of alcohol—in favor of a whiskey sour. "The more varieties of liquor in your drink, the higher your calorie intake is likely to be, so opt for just one type," say Clarke and Jarosh. A whiskey sour has similar flavors at a fraction of the caloric cost.

CALORIES SAVED 140 per drink

Swap out the sugar

Rather than a berry mojito, order "mashed strawberries combined with mint, white rum and club soda," recommend Clarke and Jarosh. "It's a great stand-in for a mojito, with way less sugar." In fact, you can request that the bartender sub in hunks of real fruit muddled in your glass, instead of syrup, for any fruit drink.

CALORIES SAVED 70 per drink

Lighten and brighten

In place of a glass of Pinot Grigio, go for a DIY wine spritzer: a smaller pour of Pinot plus a splash of hydrating club soda. "It's more filling, and it will take you longer to drink," say Clarke and Jarosh.

CALORIES SAVED 60 per drink

SELF

WANT TO MAKE HEALTHIER COCKTAILS AT HOME?

Go to Self.com/fooddiet for new slimmer summer drinks.



62%

4

MEANWHILE, YOU BURN OFF FOOD MORE SLOWLY...

Odds are good you cave in and order the fries. Double trouble: The extra calories are one thing, but you're also more likely to store them as fat. "Metabolizing alcohol takes precedence over digesting food, so you burn alcohol faster than the food-based calories," says Jennifer A. Reinhold, Pharm.D., assistant professor of clinical pharmacy at the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy.

5

AND YOU END UP HUNGRY AGAIN

As your night of fun winds down, the weighty side effects keep adding up. "Drinking causes a spike in blood sugar that prompts your pancreas to pump out extra insulin," says Reinhold. "And insulin makes you store more fat." The insulin lowers your blood-sugar levels, causing more hunger (and maybe a hankering for a big hangover brunch the next day). It's no wonder you feel bloated.

And here's your stay-slim action plan

TRACK DOWN SOME PROTEIN, PRONTO "Before you grab a drink, order a healthy app, like chicken skewers," says Kristy Del Coro, R.D., senior culinary nutritionist for Rouge Tomato restaurant in New York City. The lean protein will help you feel full and resist cravings for caloric snacks.

GO ONE-FOR-ONE As you wait for your first cocktail, hydrate your system by downing two glasses of water. Then, between drinks, swig a glass of H₂O or seltzer. "You'll stay hydrated and feel less hungry," says Reinhold.

EAT SOME MORE, JUST NOT MINDLESSLY Even if it means snacking on bar nuts. "High-protein snacks slow alcohol absorption," says Reinhold. Just keep your consumption for the evening to a handful or two. You'll take in around 200 calories of good fat and protein—far better than an 800-calorie binge after a blood-sugar crash.

PLAY BY THE ONE-HOUR RULE If you're going to imbibe more than one drink, nurse each for an hour. This lets your body process the alcohol before it overpowers your brain. Plus, if your liver has time to metabolize the booze, your body can move on to burning off other calories.



I drink beer. Will I get a "beer belly"?

No matter what type of alcohol you're drinking, if your intake puts you into calorie overload, you'll gain weight. That said, a meta-analysis in *Nutrition Reviews* found that there's not enough evidence to link drinking beer to an increase in waist size in women. And there's insufficient proof that any other kind of alcohol goes to your belly, either. "Your genes mainly determine where you tend to store extra calories," says Janis Jibrin, R.D., SELF contributing expert.

of SELF readers slam back more than three drinks when out for an evening of fun.