

Why does alcohol make my poo go weird?

December 27 2023, by Vincent Ho



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

As we enter the festive season it's a good time to think about what all those celebratory alcoholic drinks can do to your gut.

Alcohol can interfere with the time it takes for food to go through your gut (also known as the "transit time"). In particular, it can affect the

muscles of the stomach and the small [bowel](#) (also known as the [small intestine](#)).

So, how and why does [alcohol](#) make your poos goes weird? Here's what you need to know.

Diarrhea and the 'transit time'

Alcohol's effect on stomach transit time depends on the [alcohol concentration](#).

[In general](#), [alcoholic beverages](#) such as whisky and vodka with high alcohol concentrations (above 15%) slow down the movement of food in the stomach.

Beverages with comparatively low alcohol concentrations (such as wine and beer) [speed up the movement](#) of food in the stomach.

These changes in gut transit explain why some people can get a sensation of fullness and abdominal discomfort when they drink vodka or whisky.

How long someone has been [drinking](#) a lot of alcohol can affect small bowel transit.

We know from [experiments](#) with rats that chronic use of alcohol accelerates the transit of food through the stomach and small bowel.

This shortened [transit time](#) through the small bowel also happens when humans drink a lot of alcohol, and is [linked to diarrhea](#).

Alcohol can also [reduce the absorption](#) of carbohydrates, proteins and fats in the duodenum (the first part of the small bowel).

Alcohol can lead to [reduced absorption of xylose](#) (a type of sugar). This means diarrhea is [more likely to occur](#) in drinkers who also consume a lot of sugary foods such as sweets and sweetened juices.

Chronic alcohol use is also linked to:

- [lactose intolerance](#)
- [overgrowth](#) of small bowel bacteria and
- reduced absorption of fats from the [pancreas not producing](#) enough digestive enzymes.

This means chronic alcohol use may lead to diarrhea and loose stools.

How might a night of heavy drinking affect your poos?

When rats are [exposed to high doses](#) of alcohol over a short period of time, it results in small bowel transit delay.

This suggests acute alcohol intake (such as an episode of binge drinking) is more likely to lead to constipation than diarrhea.

This is backed up by [recent research](#) studying the effects of alcohol in 507 [university students](#).

These students had their stools collected and analyzed, and were asked to fill out a stool form questionnaire known as the [Bristol Stool Chart](#).

The research found a heavy drinking episode was associated with harder, firm bowel motions.

In particular, those who consumed more alcohol had more Type 1 stools, which are separate hard lumps that look or feel a bit like nuts.

The researchers believed this acute alcohol intake results in [small bowel](#) transit delay; the food stayed for longer in the intestines, meaning more water was absorbed from the stool back into the body. This led to drier, harder stools.

Interestingly, the researchers also found there was more of a type of bacteria known as "[Actinobacteria](#)" in heavy drinkers than in non-drinkers.

This suggests bacteria may have a role to play in stool [consistency](#).

But binge drinking doesn't always lead to constipation. Binge drinking in patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), for example, clearly [leads to](#) diarrhea, nausea and abdominal pain.

What can I do about all this?

If you're suffering from unwanted bowel motion changes after drinking, the most effective way to address this is to limit your alcohol intake.

Some alcoholic beverages may affect your bowel motions more than others. If you notice a pattern of troubling poos after drinking certain drinks, it may be sensible to cut back on those beverages.

If you tend to get diarrhea after drinking, avoid mixing alcohol with [caffeinated drinks](#). Caffeine is known to [stimulate contractions](#) of the colon and so could worsen diarrhea.

If constipation after drinking is the problem, then staying hydrated is important. Drinking plenty of water before drinking alcohol (and having

water in between drinks and after the party is over) can help reduce dehydration and constipation.

You should also eat before drinking alcohol, particularly protein and fiber-rich foods.

Food in the stomach can [slow the absorption](#) of alcohol and may help [protect](#) against the negative effects of alcohol on the gut lining.

Is it anything to worry about?

Changes in bowel motions after drinking are usually short term and, for the most part, resolve themselves pretty efficiently.

But if symptoms such as diarrhea persist beyond a couple of days after stopping alcohol, it may signify other concerning issues such as an underlying gut disorder like inflammatory bowel disease.

Researchers have also [linked](#) alcohol consumption to the development of irritable bowel syndrome.

If problems persist or if there are alarming symptoms such as blood in your stool, seek medical advice from a [general practitioner](#).

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Why does alcohol make my poo go weird? (2023, December 27) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-alcohol-poo-weird.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.