

Ep #150: Drinking and Weight Gain

The image is a podcast cover. On the left is a portrait of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a red top and a gold necklace, smiling with her hands clasped. On the right, the text reads: 'DRINK LESS LIFESTYLE' in a serif font, with 'LESS' in gold. Below this is a horizontal line, followed by 'PODCAST' in a smaller serif font. Underneath that, it says 'with Dr. Sherry Price' in a smaller, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the cover, there is a grey box containing the text: 'Helping women feel healthy, confident, and empowered around alcohol and in their life.'

DRINK
LESS
LIFESTYLE

PODCAST

with
Dr. Sherry Price

Helping women feel healthy, confident, and empowered around alcohol and in their life.

Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Dr. Sherry Price

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You are listening to the *Drink Less Lifestyle* podcast with Dr. Sherry Price, episode number 150.

Welcome to *Drink Less Lifestyle*, a podcast for successful women who want to change their relationship with alcohol. If you want to drink less, feel healthier and start loving life again you're in the right place. Please remember that the information in this podcast does not constitute medical advice. Now, here's your host, Dr. Sherry Price.

Well, hello my beautiful friend. We are here, we are here at podcast episode 150. What? I never imagined that I would get this far, this is just so delightful. And if you've been following me on this journey, I thank you for being a listener and I really hope this podcast has been helping you change your relationship with alcohol. So before I get started, I am going to make an announcement and tell you something exciting.

My team and I have made *Drink Less Lifestyle*, which you know is my signature program, it's inside EpicYOU. Well, we've made it a standalone course now. And the reason we decided to do this was several fold. One, I know that I have males that listen to this podcast and they were eager to learn the information inside of *Drink Less Lifestyle*, learn how to cut back on drinking, learn the tools to get them there. And so this is a way that I can meet that need for you.

As you may know, my coaching programs, my group coaching programs are for women only. And so this was a great way to get this information out to those who want it and need it. Also, I realized that not everybody wants to talk to a coach, not everybody's ready for that, not everybody wants that. And so *Drink Less Lifestyle* is a standalone course, it's self-paced, it's self-guided.

You can go at your own pace to not just learn the information I am giving you in the videos and in all the worksheets, but to apply it, to practice it because it's when you implement it in your life that it will change your life. And I always like to remind people that it's not a passive consumption of information where you get change, you have to be an active participant.

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And so through this course you'll learn how to learn those skills so you don't depend or rely or overly desire alcohol.

And as you're going through the modules, you're going to learn exactly what changes your desire for alcohol, how to do that and how to implement these practices into your life whenever you're around alcohol. And some of them, you'll be doing when you're not around alcohol, because as you know it's not just about alcohol, it's how do you enjoy yourself, it's how do you value and live towards your values and what are your values.

And also discovering what it is inside the drink that makes you want to over-drink and how can you meet that need in a healthier way that's sustainable. And I think one of the reasons why *Drink Less Lifestyle* is so transformative and why so many people love the program is because it gives you freedom and joy and happiness without the struggle.

If you've been to my webinars and my masterclasses on how to drop that struggle around alcohol, well, you learn that process inside *Drink Less Lifestyle* so it's a fun process, it's an enjoyable process. It's a process where you'll want to keep going and doing.

And just like my client, who reached out to me after a year of being done with the *Drink Less Lifestyle* program. She said, "Before I worked with you, I didn't even know drinking less could be fun, I didn't even know that was possible." And she told me, "I can honestly say now that it's so true, I had no idea how much more fun life would be with significantly less alcohol." And she said, "I don't miss the hangovers. I don't miss the mental chatter. I don't miss the guilt and the shame and I don't miss the exhaustion one bit. I have so much more energy now that I drink less."

And so I think it's so important to meet people where they're at, and not everybody wants to get on a call with a coach and talk about things and so some people want to do this in a private way. So I wanted to make that opportunity available. So if you want to join the *Drink Less Lifestyle* program, you can go to my website [epicyou E-P-I-C-Y-O-U.com](http://epicyouE-P-I-C-Y-O-U.com) and just click under the Work With Me page and you will see it there.

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Do know that once you purchase this program you will have access to it for life. And that is such a huge benefit for people who want to keep going over the material and keep practicing the material and having them have a guide along the way.

Now, I'm recording this podcast a bit early as when it gets released I will be with my family in Pennsylvania and it's going to probably be a hard trip, I think, because they are aging and they're aging pretty rapidly, their health is declining. And I think some tough choices are going to have to be discussed and made on this trip.

For those of you that don't know, I have a mom who is morbidly overweight, she is morbidly obese. And that has really been the demise of her health over the last 20 years. I have seen it bring on multiple conditions such as diabetes Type 2 and rheumatoid arthritis and a bunch of other medical conditions because of her weight.

And seeing this as her daughter and just seeing how much struggle this has brought to her life has really made me an advocate and very passionate for women to be a healthy weight, so they don't have these consequences. So they don't have this lifestyle that they wish was different. And again, watching her struggle has strengthened my resolve and strengthened my commitment and strengthened my passion for helping women who do struggle with weight gain.

And I have to say, it is a passion. I can read about hormones and the body and how it works and food and I have been really educating myself deeply in the past couple of years because I thought I had it all down. And then there's perimenopause. And all these hormonal issues and how they impact our bodies and how our bodies change as women and how age changes our bodies over time.

And not only that, there has just been an explosion of new data in the past, even 15/20 years on all the things that we are learning. And what I'm discovering is I have to forget a lot of what I learned in the SnackWell's era and when I went to pharmacy school because the way they taught weight loss then is actually not factual and not the best way to lose weight and it

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doesn't cause weight loss. A lot of those ways that I thought would lose weight that I was taught, we found out that the research was wrong or falsified or it didn't come from good sources.

And so in this podcast episode, I really want to dive into a number of ways that alcohol and over-drinking causes weight gain. I think we talk about alcohol and how it's detrimental to the liver and how it's detrimental to the brain and how it's detrimental to overall health and its addictive properties and all these other things. But what I really want to dive into is how alcohol causes belly fat. It causes us to gain adipose tissue, it causes us to gain weight.

And I really think we need to look at that because for many women that I work with, the primary reason they want to cut back on drinking is it's impacting their weight. Whether they're not able to lose weight or they're at a weight loss plateau or now they notice they're gaining weight or their belly is feeling bloated or their jeans don't fit the right way. Gaining weight is a primary motivator for a lot of people to cut back.

And I think that's a great thing because whatever is going to motivate us to care more about our health, to care more and have more awareness about what we put in our bodies, I think is a beautiful thing. So if you're listening to this podcast and you feel like that's you, I'm putting on a few extra pounds, I'm not liking it. Well, I'm going to tell you exactly how alcohol is doing that.

So first I want to start with the low hanging fruit and talk about alcohol and calories. So if you look at the three macronutrients. We have carbohydrates, which includes sugar. And then we have protein and we have fat. So if we look at carbs and protein, we know that that gives us four calories per gram, so four calories per gram, so sugar and protein four calories per gram. We know that fat gives us nine calories per gram, so more calories per gram.

But then we look at alcohol and that's at seven calories per gram, so more than sugar and more than protein. So we know that calories is not the whole story, but we're starting there. So just comparing sugar to alcohol,

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which many alcohols are just fermented sugar, it provides a bigger punch in terms of calories per gram than sugar. So sugar comes in at four calories per gram, alcohol seven.

Now, similar to sugar, alcohol is nothing but empty calories, similar to added sugars. And I'm not talking about sugar from fruit because sugar from fruit we get fiber and we get some phytonutrients and other things. But if we're just looking at added sugars and alcohol, we know that they are both empty calories. What does that mean? Has no nutritional value, has no protein, no amino acids, no micronutrients, no minerals, nothing that the body can use. So completely empty calories, completely no nutritional value, so it doesn't benefit your body in any way.

Now, what else do we know about consuming alcohol? When most people consume alcohol, they do it very passively in a mindless state, meaning they're doing other things and alcohol is just in the background. Whether they're watching a movie and sipping wine or having beer or watching a sporting event, watching a baseball game, football game, just drinking beer or some kind of wine while they're doing something else. Their mind is not on their drinking, it's on something else, the movie, the sporting event, the concert, the conversation at dinner.

And the problem with that, doing it from a passive standpoint is that we're not paying attention and it oftentimes leads to drinking more than you want. So now we get more calories that we weren't planning on having, and we're doing it passively, which means not mindfully where it gets out of control. And if you listened to last week's podcast, I am all about being an intentional drinker, being mindful with your drinking, just like you want to be mindful with the amount of sugar you take in.

So passively consuming calories oftentimes leads to consuming more calories, consuming more alcohol. Now, I want to go on a little caveat here is that because alcohol is a toxin, meaning it's not good for the body, the body knows it's foreign and it's toxic. The body prioritizes breaking alcohol down before doing other things the body was meant to do.

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So for instance, we know the liver breaks down alcohol. So when we drink alcohol the body knows this is a toxin, takes it right to the liver and the liver will stop doing its other tasks and put alcohol in front of the line. It'll say, "Wow, you're a toxin, I need to break you down first before I absorb nutrients over here from that meal, before I continue with digestion over here and break down those components of that meal."

Or maybe your liver was involved in burning fat and that process had to stop because now it has to break down the alcohol. So alcohol gets to go to the front of the line because the body prioritizes getting rid of toxins so it doesn't die. So when you're drinking alcohol, just think, your body is prioritizing breaking that down rather than other functions it could be doing. So it's stopping fat burning, it's stopping other things that might be benefiting your body.

So I think that's very good information to know. So we know exactly how the body works and what it prioritizes in terms of metabolism. Now, we talked about alcohol being similar to sugar in that it's just empty calories. Alcohol is also very similar to sugar in how it works in the brain. Both alcohol and added sugars work on the reward center of the brain and that reward center when it has these substances, it will release dopamine. So sugar makes us feel good. Alcohol makes us feel good.

And also you know dopamine triggers the do it again, the learning and the memory, that felt good, let's do that again and let's do more of that. So since they work similarly in the brain, they both lead to a dependence and lead to addiction. People can be sugar addicted, people could be alcohol addicted because the same mechanisms are in play.

Now, I want to go into this a little deeper. I know some of my audience you are also in the healthcare field, you're nurses, you're doctors, you're pharmacists, fellow health advocates and healthcare practitioners. And so when we look at alcohol and we know it's a toxin we also know it's a mitochondrial toxin. And what are the mitochondria? When we go back to biology, we learn that they are the powerhouses of the cell, they create and produce our energy.

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And so alcohol, just like added sugars, is a mitochondrial toxin, meaning it's going to affect these mitochondria of our cells that promote the health, wellness, vitality and energy source for our cells. And if we look at the effects of alcohol, we can see it's similar to sugar. When you start drinking alcohol or when you start eating sugar and start having those cakes and cookies or pastries, it tastes good, it feels good. And then what happens a couple of hours later? There's a crash, you're tired, you're sluggish, you don't feel so good for alcohol, that could be the next day.

You're skipping workouts, you're not as motivated, you don't have as much energy. And that's partly because of the ramifications on the mitochondria. Now, I want to talk about something else that's well documented in the literature but I don't feel is out there in the public knowledge a lot. And that alcohol is a toxin, that we know and the body experiences this as a stressor. So when we put a toxin into our body the body knows it's foreign, it shouldn't be there, it's not good for the body. We've got to metabolize it, we've got to get rid of it because the body could die.

And so that's a form of stress on the body. Just like if we have too much sugar in our blood, we know the body is like, ah, this can cause our organs to shut down, this could put us into DKA or hyperosmolar, osmotic syndrome, all of that. So the body wants to rid the blood of sugar. That's why we secrete insulin to get it out of the blood so it doesn't harm the vessels and it doesn't harm the organs. So the body's sophisticated system knows what's considered toxic and what it needs to rid of.

So that is a form of stress on the body and so when we experience stress, whether that's stress from our work, stress from our jobs, we can also experience stress from what we eat and what we drink. And as I was preparing for this podcast, I was digging into some of the data that looks at alcohol being a stress on the body and how it stimulates the HPA axis, the hypothalamic pituitary axis. And the body secretes more cortisol and cortisol is our stress hormone. So if we're running from a tiger, we are stressed at work, we get increased levels of cortisol.

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Now the body's equipped to handle acute cortisol and acute stress but the body is not equipped to handle chronic stress. And so if you think about drinking every single day as a stressor, we are essentially putting our bodies into chronic stress. And just like chronic stress from work or from your kids or from finances, it raises our cortisol levels, alcohol raises our cortisol levels. So what does that mean?

Well, when we get high cortisol, we also get high glucose and when glucose levels are elevated our insulin gets secreted. And so we could go on to develop insulin resistance, pre diabetes and then diabetes Type 2. We also know that insulin is putting sugar into the different various body parts. It fills up the liver, it fills up the muscles, once those are filled and we still have excess glucose, where does it go? Well, the body stores it as fat and not just any type of fat, but visceral fat.

And visceral fat is the most dangerous form of fat because it's the type of fat that leads to cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, strokes, and many other chronic diseases. So I refer to visceral fat as belly fat because that's the main place it starts to accumulate. You might see those t-shirts like, hey, here's my spare tire. Or we talk about that when men drink a lot of beer, they put on weight around their belly, it becomes the spare tire.

We also see that in women particularly around perimenopause and menopause, because our hormones are causing fluctuations which can predispose us to put on belly fat. There's blood sugar dysregulation at that time as well, including other factors that make women more predisposed to put on belly fat or this visceral fat. Well, alcohol also causes that belly fat and it becomes more pronounced as we go through perimenopause and menopause.

Now, here's an interesting thing about belly fat. Belly fat has more cortisol receptors, so the more times you experience stress and you get elevated cortisol levels, which will increase blood sugar, which will cause more belly fat to occur, we have higher receptors inside of that belly fat, meaning that it becomes easier to gain more belly fat. And belly fat also stimulates

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production of cortisol. So now we're hit with a double whammy on how belly fat can increase so quickly.

And this is a common reason why people will start to worry when they feel their pants are getting tighter or that they have to go up a size in their pants because this is where the fat is accumulating. So as I was researching this, I wanted to share this with you because I think this is so important to know, particularly if you're in that season of life that I am.

Where I'm navigating perimenopause and how my body is changing and how my exercise needs to change during this timeframe as well because what I was doing in terms of exercise and how I was eating was no longer giving me the results that I wanted. And as a results oriented person and as a results oriented coach, if we're not getting the results we want, we have to investigate why. And we can't deny the fact that our bodies change over time.

If I get emotional about this or upset about this, I'm not really helping myself find answers to how I need to adjust if I am denying that my body is aging, changing, hormonal fluctuations are occurring. And by denying any of that I'm just delaying getting success. So as I'm navigating this space and learning more about how alcohol interplays with cortisol, how it raises estrogen and causes more fluctuations, more hot flushes.

And also alcohol's effects on other hormones in our body like melatonin and how we get sleep disturbances because of it, which feeds into poor sleep, which feeds into more cortisol being produced. Because we get disturbances in our circadian rhythm, which can lead to disturbances in our blood sugar regulation, which leads us to want more sugar and crave more carbs and sugar and potentially crave more alcohol. It's just this interplay between all of these hormones and how they are interacting with our body and how alcohol is the main culprit causing a lot of these hormonal imbalances in our body.

So as I'm learning this information, I find it very interesting that this has been known about for a while and yet it's not being talked about. And in fact, how many people would consider alcohol a de-stressor, a way to

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unwind at the end of the day? Nobody's talking about how it is a stressor for our body and how it increases cortisol and could put us into chronic stress syndrome. And ladies, if we are in chronic stress, that will sabotage any weight loss. That causes us to enter a weight loss plateau.

And particularly after what we've been through in these past few years with the pandemic and how many pivots we had to change and move and adapt, we don't need more stress in our life. And here's another thing I want us to consider. We know that when we put this substance into our body, it causes these chemical reactions. We're going to drink it. It's going to elevate cortisol, that's going to elevate blood sugar. It's going to give us a source of calories.

It's going to present to the liver as something that needs to be broken down right away and stop all the other processes in the body. And it's going to cause that rush of a bit of a high and then we're going to crash just like we would with sugar. But then we wake up the next day after a binge or after overdoing it, and just think about the amount of stress we put on ourselves mentally because of how much we drink, because of our relationship with alcohol the day before.

So we have the physical stress of the alcohol entering our body and then we have the emotional mental stress about it the next day because we're beating ourselves up. And that sets us up for a perfect dynamic to not only gain weight, but to keep it on. No wonder why the body is not releasing it, the body is worried about all this stress.

So I think we should be talking about the exact things that alcohol does to us on a biological level so we can understand how an over-drinking issue can cause an overweight issue. And feeling more stressed and having more belly fat, or how it's sabotaging our weight loss goals and how it's zapping our energy because it's a mitochondrial toxin. I don't know about for you, but when things make logical sense to me it's more easy for me to understand it and then adapt a practice where now that I know better, I do better.

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So for me, when my brain could connect the dots and see, when I over-drink it's sabotaging my weight loss goals, it's sabotaging my health goals, it's sabotaging my energy. I am more likely to stay mindful of my drinking and create boundaries around it. It's not that I'm anti-alcohol, it's that I'm pro health, I am pro wellness. I'm pro helping my body achieve a state where it feels good, where I'm mentally stable, emotionally stable and physically I like how I feel and I look.

And I really want to open this discussion up around belly fat because I think the pendulum might have swung too far in one direction talking about not body shaming and body positivity. And while I'm all for that, I also think we also have to say, "Okay, but is this healthy for your body? Is this sabotaging any goals that you want to achieve?"

And when I look at my mom, she can have all the body positivity she wants, but her weight is getting in the way of living a healthier life, it's creating disease, multiple diseases. And the one thing about her generation is they didn't have the knowledge, they didn't have the resources, they didn't have the science and they didn't have the internet.

So just think what a blessing it is that we have access to all this information at our fingertips for free, and that we can learn this information and start applying it right away so we get the benefits of it. And that's what I am about, sharing this information with you so you can make smarter choices. You can make choices more aligned with what you value and what's important to you.

And by all means, if you're listening to this podcast and you want to lose weight, lose weight, there is no shame in that. If you want to be healthier, get healthier. If you want to be more metabolically fit and live a long life full of vitality and energy, let's do that. Let's motivate one another so we can get that. I don't see one negative in becoming healthier. And I don't see one negative in encouraging others to become healthier. I see that as a form of love, self-love that radiates out.

I'm not saying I'm perfect, but I am learning on my journey, on how my body needs to be fueled differently as I move through different ages and stages

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of my life. I also see how I need to move it differently. I also understand that what worked before doesn't work now. I also understand that the data has changed about what was good then versus what is good now. And I don't want to get bogged down with things of the past that hold me back or any minutiae that's going to be in the way of change and progress and health for my future.

So as I learn to navigate my own health journey, I'm sharing this with you so you can understand and learn how to navigate your health journey. And one key component of that is what we put in our mouth, what we eat and what we drink. And if we are overing it in either of those areas, it's going to change what's going on inside of us biologically, it's also going to change how we think and feel about ourselves.

And so use this information to really analyze what is your relationship with alcohol and is it one that's sabotaging your weight loss goals or not? And if it is, no worries, we have the tools to fix it, we have the tools to change it. And you know one of my favorite sayings is not knowledge is power but knowledge implemented is power. So as I discovered this information, I'm using it to decrease my belly fat.

So as I was doing this research, knowing the effects alcohol now has on stress and how the body perceives alcohol as a stress and how that leads to increased cortisol, which can lead to increased belly fat. And I'm doing things in my phase of life now to reduce belly fat and examining how alcohol plays into that is very important.

I hope you found this information helpful for your weight loss and health journey. And if you feel a friend can benefit from this information or learn about the effects alcohol has on the body, share it with them. Be on a health and wellness journey together with someone, make it fun because when it's fun, it's sustainable. And not only that, it's a reason why people come together and they can enhance relationships when both parties have the same goal.

In no way did I mean for this conversation to be triggering for anybody, in fact, I'm hoping for just the opposite, that we get passionate about our

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health and we get passionate about our wellness. And that we now have the science to prove what is actually happening and that we share that information with others. Alright, my beautiful friend, I love you and I will see you next week.

If you want to change your relationship with alcohol and with yourself then come check out EpicYOU. It's where you get individualized help mastering the tools so you can become a woman who can take it or leave it and be in control around alcohol in any situation. EpicYOU is the place for women who want to be healthy, confident and empowered to accomplish their goals and live their best life. Come join us over at epicyou.com/epicyou. That's [epicyou.com/ E-P-I-C-Y-O-U](http://epicyou.com/E-P-I-C-Y-O-U). I can't wait to see you there.