



SERVITUP

**SMART
ALCOHOL
SERVICE
TECHNIQUES**





In our previous content, we covered some of the risks and rewards associated with serving alcohol at your establishment.

Now that you know [how alcohol affects the body](#), [how to detect risky situations](#), and [some of the laws surrounding alcohol sales](#), let's explore several techniques meant to prevent guests from becoming intoxicated so you can protect your customers, your community, and yourself.

In this smart alcohol service guide, we'll talk about:



Measuring and counting drinks



Slow service techniques



Serving food with alcohol



Serving alcohol to-go



Keeping guests hydrated

Measuring and Counting Drinks

Different alcoholic drinks, such as distilled spirits, wine, beer, and mixed drinks, have different amounts of alcohol. Denoted as a “proof” or as an **Alcohol By Volume (ABV)** percentage, the amount of pure alcohol a drink contains determines its **strength** and **serving size**.



The strength of liquor is regularly indicated by its proof. By dividing the proof listed on a bottle of liquor by two, you can determine how much alcohol that bottle contains as a percentage.

For example, if a bottle of whiskey is 100-proof, the bottle is 50% alcohol.

$$100\text{-proof} \div 2 = 50\% \text{ alcohol}$$



The strength of beer, wine, and sometimes liquor, is typically measured by its ABV. The ABV is the percentage of a drink that is alcohol.

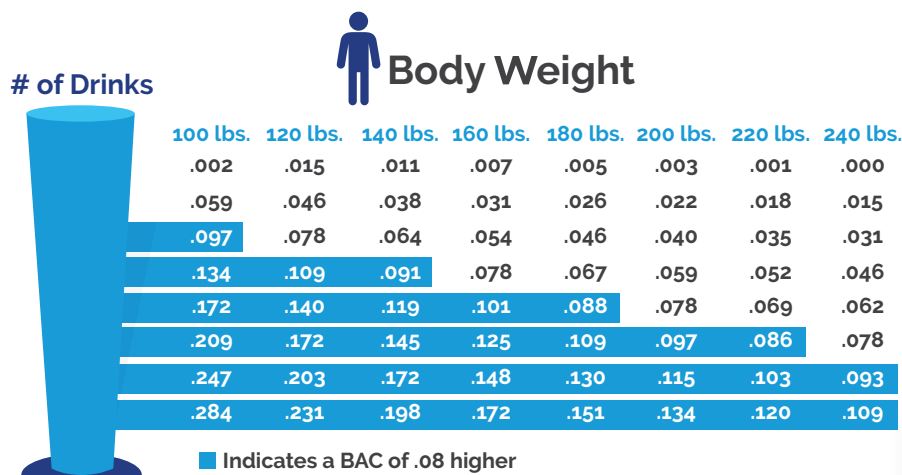
For example, if a beer has an ABV of 5%, the beer is composed of 5% alcohol.

$$5\% \text{ ABV} = 5\% \text{ alcohol}$$



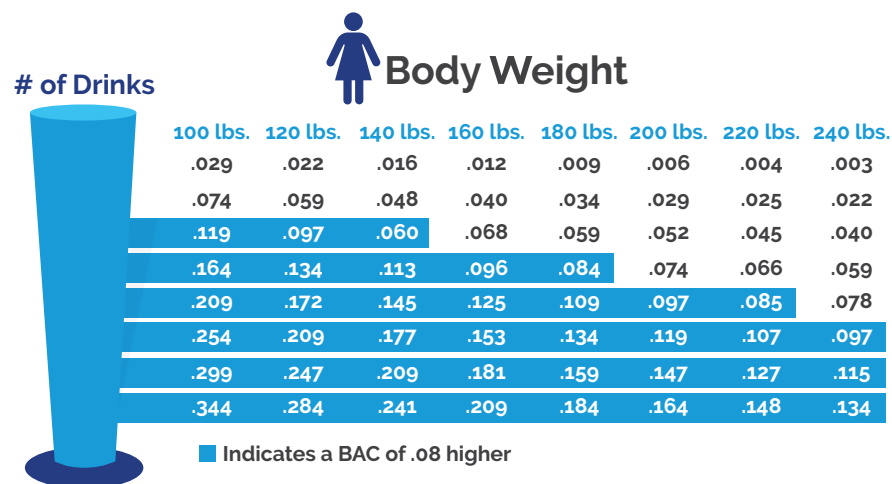
Standard Drink Measurements

Recall that BAC, or **Blood Alcohol Content**, is the amount of alcohol in a person's bloodstream at a given time. Nearly all 50 states have defined the legal level of intoxication for driving at **.08**.



As a server, it is your job to prevent intoxication and try to keep your customer's **BAC lower than .08**.

While it can be difficult to calculate a person's exact BAC, **measuring standard drink sizes** can help you maintain a drink limit and prevent intoxication.



Standard Drink Measurements



WINE

12% | 5oz.



MIXED DRINK

80-proof liquor | 1.5 oz.



BEER

5% | 12oz.



STRAIGHT SHOT

100-proof liquor | 1 oz.



All of these are examples of what is considered **one standard drink**. Although the sizes of these drinks vary widely, they each contain around the same amount of alcohol. A healthy liver processes alcohol at a constant rate of about one standard drink per hour.

Remember, these are just drink standards. Sometimes drinks are sold in large, non-standard glasses or as doubles, and craft beer and specialty wine often have higher ABV percentages.

Use this simple calculation to figure out how many standard drinks are in a particular beverage:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{Amount of} \\ \text{liquor in the} \\ \text{beverage} \end{array} \div \begin{array}{l} \text{Amount of} \\ \text{liquor in 1} \\ \text{standard drink} \end{array} = \begin{array}{l} \text{Number of} \\ \text{drinks in the} \\ \text{beverage} \end{array}$$



Counting Drinks

Tracking the amount of alcoholic drinks served to a particular customer is vital for ensuring their safety and for protecting you from liability.

After estimating a customer's BAC and using the standard drink guide above, track a customer's standard drink count using one of these simple methods:

- + Use a physical tally sheet, or mark drinks on a coaster or napkin.
- + Place a printed receipt in front of the guest and update it each time the guest is served another drink.
- + Keep a drink tally on the back of the guest check.
- + Use the point-of-sale system.

Make sure to communicate drink counts with other servers to prevent over-serving.

Also, if your establishment serves mixed drinks, measure liquor using a jigger, a mechanical pour spout, or an accurate free-pour method.



Accidentality over-pouring a drink is not only dangerous—it can cost your business big time

A one-ounce over-pour of liquor into a mixed drink or shot can lose a restaurant or bar nearly **50% of the potential revenue** of that bottle, resulting in thousands of dollars lost per year.¹

Serving Food with Alcohol

Many different factors affect a person's BAC, one of them being food. Food keeps alcohol in the stomach for a longer period of time, slowing its movement into the small intestine and—more importantly—into the bloodstream.

A person who has not eaten will have a higher BAC than a person who has. This is because food keeps alcohol in the stomach for longer, slowing the absorption of alcohol into the bloodstream and **resulting in a lower BAC**.

Any food is better than no food, but there are a few smart food options for preventing intoxication:



BETTER CHOICES

..... High Fat Foods



High Protein Foods



Foods that are high in fat and/or protein take longer to digest and slow the movement of alcohol into the bloodstream. Examples of foods to suggest to customers who are drinking include chicken wings, pizza, cheese, fried food, meat, fish, eggs, or yogurt.



POORER CHOICES

..... High Carbohydrate Foods



High Salt Foods



Foods that are high in carbohydrates and/or salty foods are not as good for slowing the absorption of alcohol. Carbohydrates are generally digested faster than high fat, high protein foods whereas salty foods can make customers thirsty, prompting them to order more alcoholic drinks. Examples of foods to avoid suggesting include bread, pasta, desserts, sweets, peanuts, chips, pretzels, or crackers.

Suggesting good food choices to customers who are drinking can help ensure a lower BAC while keeping them full and satisfied.



Keeping Guests Hydrated

Drinking alcohol is dehydrating.

After alcohol has passed into the bloodstream and has been metabolized, the liver works to process the remaining alcohol.

The process of breaking down alcohol in the liver acts as a diuretic and can lead to dehydration.²



Additionally, water is flushed out of the body faster than alcohol is processed and can cause a spike in BAC if water is not replenished.³

Dehydration caused by alcohol can cause guests to drink more than they normally would in attempts to quench their thirst. It's crucial to keep guests well hydrated with frequent water refills.

If you must stop alcohol service for an intoxicated patron, offering them non-alcoholic drinks can help them feel less left-out.

Slow Service Techniques

There are a few other techniques you can utilize when trying to slow down a customer's drinking.

Try to be mindful of how often you pass a customer's table. If you pass a table often and you find a guest ordering a new drink each time you pass, give the table some distance. **You can keep your eye on the table to ensure guests are satisfied while slowing down alcohol service.**



Consider talking to your manager about implementing a drink limit—some restaurants and bars have a maximum drink allowance per customer per hour. **These limits slow drinking and can help prevent intoxication.**



If you're ever in a situation where you're unsure how to slow down alcohol service or deal with an intoxicated guest, it's always best to grab a manager for help.

Serving Alcohol To-Go

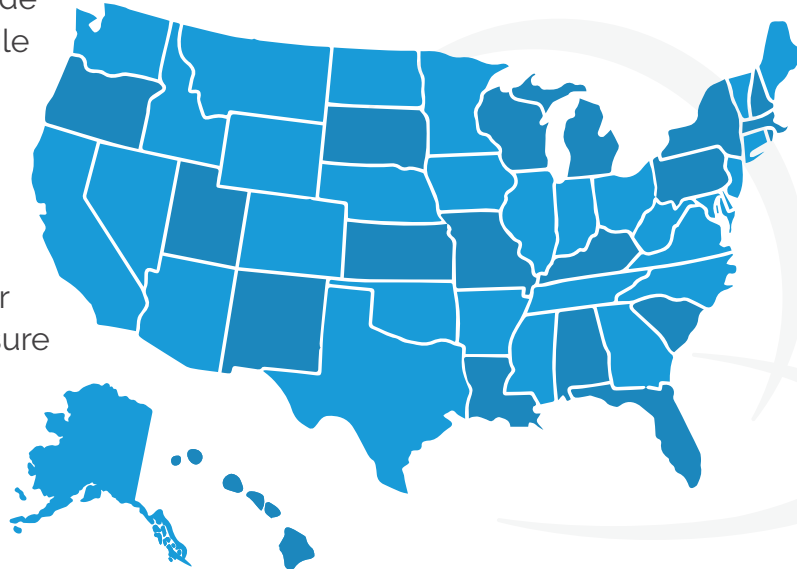
The COVID-19 pandemic has brought along many changes to the food and beverage industry.

To expand take-out options and make up for lost dine-in revenue, laws surrounding the sales and service of alcoholic beverages sold to-go have changed across much of the U.S.

These laws are determined by each state, vary widely, and are subject to change. **Always refer to your state's Alcoholic Beverage Council (ABC) site for alcohol to-go details.**

As of 2023, 23 states have made alcohol to-go permanent, while another 11 are allowing it on a long-term, but temporary basis. Of the states serving alcohol to-go, all require the server or delivery person to verify the age of the customer purchasing the alcohol to ensure no sale is made to minors.

And remember, you may be liable as a server or delivery person if you sell alcohol to an obviously intoxicated person.





Let the Good Times Roll with ServSafe

ServSafe Alcohol is informed by a team of lawyers, professors, and industry professionals to bring business owners and servers the best possible practices for responsible alcohol handling.

Want to put your knowledge to the test? Head over to [ServSafe](#) to get a leg up in the industry by earning your alcohol handling certification.

Stay tuned for more safe alcohol handling content presented by ServItUp.

¹Francis. (2017, April 27). How Overpouring Drains Profits and 4 Ways to Plug the Leaks in Your Venue.

²Jewell. (2019, May 23). Does Alcohol Dehydrate You?

³Jewell. (2019, May 23). Does Alcohol Dehydrate You?