# Rethinking alcohol: Can heavy drinkers learn to cut back?

**By Allison Aubrey, NPR**

The thinking about alcohol dependence used to be black and white.

There was a belief that there were two kinds of drinkers: alcoholics and everyone else.

“But that dichotomy – yes or no, you have it or you don’t – is inadequate,” says Dr. John Mariani, who researches substance abuse at Columbia University. He says the thinking has evolved, and the field recognizes there’s a spectrum.

Problems with alcohol run the gamut from mild to severe. And there are as many kinds of drinkers along the continuum as there are personality types.

People with severe problems, such as those who keep on drinking even after they lose jobs or get DUIs, need treatment to stop drinking completely.

But there are other drinkers, including some who are in the habit of drinking more than one or two drinks a day, who may be able to cut back or moderate their consumption and reduce their risk.

Women who consume eight or more drinks per week are considered excessive drinkers, according to the CDC. Breast cancer, liver disease and heart disease have all been linked to excessive drinking over time.

In fact, a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that the majority of Americans who drink more than one or two drinks a day are not alcoholics. They don’t report symptoms of dependence.

**Read the whole story**

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# Watching cooking shows leads to weight gain

**By Roberto A. Ferdman, Washington Post**

Food television has been something of a revelation. As Americans cook less and less, they seem compelled to watch people cook more and more. The mouthwatering viewer experience – which features cooking shows and competitions, food travel adventures and other gustatory escapades – has captivated people around the country.

The Food Network, the genre's most coveted brand, alone gathers an average audience of more than 1 million viewers each night. And it's just one of a growing number of networks that routinely feature series about food and eating. Chefs – some professionally trained, others less formally practiced – are increasingly bringing new, exciting and delicious culinary ideas into living rooms.

Mostly women watch these shows, often to learn specific cooking skills. But when people watch more of these food shows on television, it turns out they're also gaining more weight, according to a new study by researchers at Cornell University. And they're even more likely to gain weight if they also cook.

**Read the whole story**

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# Classes map course to grow veggies in Nev.

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is offering eight Grow Your Own, Nevada classes at 12 locations statewide to help Nevadans who want to get on a path to more sustainable, local, healthy living by growing more of their own food.

The series of workshops will run April 7-30, and be Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 to 8. The workshops will provide gardeners and those interested in growing healthy foods with a back-to-the-basics guide to producing bountiful harvests in Nevada.

The workshop topics will include:

April 7: GMOs: Facts and Fallacies
April 9: Composting and Vermicomposting
April 14: Weeds, Critters and Insects
April 16: Growing Garlic in Northern Nevada
April 21: Wine and Beer Making (heavy on the wine)
April 23: Fruit Trees for High Desert Orchards
April 28: Berry Production
April 30: Walapinis: Experience With a Belowground Greenhouse.

The workshops will be live at the Washoe County Cooperative Extension office, 4955 Energy Way in Reno, and will also be available via interactive video at Cooperative Extension offices in Battle Mountain, Carson City, Elko, Eureka, Fallon, Hawthorne, Lovelock, Pahrump, Tonopah, Winnemucca and Yerington.

To register for any or all of the classes, go online.

# Lawsuit: Calif. wines contain dangerous arsenic levels

**By Ben O'Donnell, Wine Spectator**

Are some California wineries "secretly poisoning wine consumers"? That's one of the incendiary charges being leveled in a class-action lawsuit against several of the biggest companies in American wine, filed March 19 in a California state court. At the heart of the suit is that the "defendants produce, manufacture and/or distribute wine in California that contains inorganic arsenic in amounts far in excess of what is allowed in drinking water."

The spokesman for one company named in the suit and others in the industry argue that the lawsuit is spurious and based on misinformation.

The plaintiffs "decided to file a complaint based on misleading and selective information in order to defame responsible California winemakers, create unnecessary fear, and distort and deceive the public for their own financial gain," said a spokesman for The Wine Group (TWG), one of the defendants.

The lawsuit names several large companies, including TWG, Treasury Wine Estates, Trinchero, Fetzer Vineyards and Bronco, following claims that a Denver laboratory found inorganic arsenic in 83 brands, including Franzia, Sutter Home, Concannon, Wine Cube, Beringer, Flipflop, Fetzer, Korbel, Almaden, Trapiche, Cupcake, Smoking Loon and Charles Shaw.

"Almost all of them are $10 or less, and the vast majority of those are under $5," said lawyer Brian Kabateck, whose firm is one of three bringing the suit, at a press conference today after the complaint was filed in the Superior Court of California's Los Angeles branch. "The consumer may be spending

less than $5 for a bottle of wine, but they may be paying with their health in the long run. These are very serious allegations that we're raising against the wine industry."

**Read the whole story**

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# Oversight lacking of food imported to U.S.

**By Katharine Mieszkowski, Reveal**

Call it the international food movement: From blueberries to raw sushi, the tide of imported food is rising in the U.S.

Right now, about one-sixth of what Americans eat comes from outside our borders. But in recent years, food imports have grown an average of 10 percent a year, a trend that's expected to continue. About 90 percent of our seafood, such as shrimp and tilapia fillets, comes from other countries, as well as about half of our fresh fruit. That's despite the growing popularity of farmers markets and the local food movement.

As what we eat becomes increasingly globalized, federal regulators are scrambling to prevent unsafe products from entering our borders. A new report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office casts doubt on how effective they are at keeping food imports safe.

The stakes are high, because outbreaks of food borne illness can be deadly. In 2012, a listeriosis outbreak linked to ricotta cheese imported from Italy killed four of the 22 Americans it sickened.

Even with food grown within the U.S.'s borders, regulators

struggle to prevent and curb outbreaks of food borne illness. Food safety is such a problem that Congress and President Obama are considering whether the now scattered oversight of the nation's food supply should be consolidated into one agency.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has primary responsibility for overseeing the safety of most of what we eat, with notable exceptions such as meat and poultry. But that federal agency examines only about 2 percent of food imports at ports of entry and actually tests even less than that.

So in 2008, the FDA started opening foreign offices to help identify unsafe food, drugs and products before they make their way to the U.S. The agency now has seven of these offices around the world in China, India, Europe and Latin America. The FDA was unable to provide a budget for these foreign offices by press time.

A new report from the GAO said it's unclear if those offices are making our food safer. That's because the offices don't have performance measures to track and evaluate specifically how what they do improves food safety.

"We don't really know the extent to which the foreign offices are contributing to the safety of imported food," said J. Alfredo Gomez, a director on the office's natural resources and environment team.

In one area, the GAO report found that the FDA is clearly falling short. The agency is failing to perform the number of inspections of foreign food facilities that they're required to do under the Food Safety Modernization Act of 2011. "They're not following the law as currently laid out," Gomez said.

The FDA has the authority to refuse entry of food into the United States if its inspectors have not been allowed access

to the foreign facilities where it was produced. But without adequate inspections, that threat doesn't really have teeth.

Plus, the agency has no plans to even try to perform all the inspections that they're mandated to do, citing budgetary constraints. FDA officials questioned the value of doing all those inspections, too, preferring instead to focus their limited resources on providing technical assistance to the food industry – both domestic and foreign – to comply with new U.S. food regulations.

The GAO report also found that the FDA's foreign offices are understaffed. Nearly half of the positions in these offices were vacant, with most of the openings in China, where the agency has had trouble getting visas from the Chinese government. The staffing problem in China is so bad that the agency sometimes relies on translators provided by the firms that they're inspecting, the report found. That could risk compromising the integrity of their findings.

Officials from the FDA's foreign offices defended their work to the General Accountability Office, citing instances where they'd made "significant contributions to determining the cause of outbreaks that lead to illnesses or deaths in the United States." For instance, the India office rapidly inspected tuna processing plants in 2012 that were potential sources of a salmonella outbreak that sickened 425 people in the U.S. in 28 different states, including 55 hospitalizations.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that for every documented case of salmonella poisoning, 29 cases may remain unreported, putting the likely toll of that outbreak at more like 12,325 illnesses. Eventually, Moon Marine USA Corp. of Cupertino, California, voluntarily recalled the frozen raw yellowfin tuna from India implicated in the outbreak.

Yet by the time U.S. inspectors reached the seafood company in southern India, the damage had been done, Fair Warning reported in 2014. Inspectors found “water tanks rife with microbiological contamination, rusty carving knives, peeling paint above the work area, unsanitary bathrooms and an outdoor ice machine covered with insects and ‘apparent bird feces.’ ”

The inspectors aren’t supposed to only be reactive, either. They have the ability to inspect these kinds of facilities before outbreaks; any company that wants to ship food to the United States has to agree to be inspected, or the FDA can refuse their food.

In all, Fair Warning found, the FDA rejects about the same number of food imports as it did a decade ago – when imports were less than half the current level.

The General Accountability Office made several recommendations about how the foreign offices could be improved, but it noted that it had made two of those same recommendations in another report in 2010, and the FDA had not complied with them.

A spokesperson for the FDA said the agency had no comment on the GAO report beyond its official response that is included in it. That response says the agency has made significant progress toward meeting the 2010 goals.

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# Thirst for craft beer increasing in U.S.

**By Alison Griswold, Slate**

America’s craft breweries are thirsty for a lot more market

share. By 2020, the trade association representing small and independent brewers in the U.S. says its members will satisfy 20 percent of the country's beer consumption.

That's quite a bit when you consider that in 2014 beer giant Anheuser-Busch (which includes Budweiser, Rolling Rock, Corona, Stella Artois, and other brands) made up an estimated 45 percent of the U.S. market and MillerCoors another 25 percent or so. But according to the Brewers Association, craft beer might already be more than halfway there – in 2014, its market share flowed into the double digits (at 22.2 million barrels, or 11 percent of volume) for the first time.

Estimates from Beer Marketer's Insights, an industry research group and publication, are more conservative, putting craft beer's volume share closer to 8.9 percent in 2014.

But numbers-parsing aside, the point everyone agrees on is that craft beer is popular, growing fast, and unlikely to slow down any time soon. The Brewers Association put craft beer's 22.2 million barrels in 2014 at an 18 percent increase in volume and a 22 percent increase in sales over the previous year.

**Read the whole story**

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# Food industry bitter over proposed sugar labels

**By Evan Halper, Los Angeles Times**

Of all the issues the Obama administration is grappling with, a modest redesign of what food labels say about sweeteners

might not have seemed among the more controversial. But ever since first lady Michelle Obama unveiled the plan last year, a lobbying frenzy has ensued.

The objections have come not only from candy makers and bottlers of soft drinks.

The governor of Massachusetts implored the administration to rethink its proposal. The governor of Wisconsin protested too. So did the government of Australia, which warned the move could violate international trade agreements.

The proposal being considered by the Food and Drug Administration would add a new line to labels on packaged products noting how many teaspoons of sugar had been added.

**Read the whole story**

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# How humble salt became king of ingredients

**By Maria Fitzpatrick, Wall Street Journal**

You could say it all started with a deconstructed lasagna. When a small, century-old, family-run saltworks in Maldon, England, got a call from El Bulli, they couldn’t have imagined what would happen next. Wanted: one case of their finest crystals, in perfectly uniform but oversize pyramid shapes, individually wrapped in cotton wool and dispatched in haste to Ferran Adrià—the finishing touch for his latest culinary creation.

It was the mid-1990s, and the revered Spanish chef’s molecular gastronomy had yet to filter through to the masses; to anyone

outside the business, treating salt crystals like precious jewels would have seemed like madness. Today? Not so much.

Thanks to the influence of tastemakers like Mr. Adrià, the humble substance has become a status ingredient not only in restaurants but in our own kitchens. We're taking everything with a pinch of the stuff, be it smoked and sultry, coarse and colorful, or delicately interlaced with celery, truffle, cumin or chili.

According to David Turner, global food and drink analyst at market-research firm Mintel, there's been a marked jump in premium salts coming to market worldwide – 22 percent more in 2014 compared with a year earlier.

**Read the whole story**

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# Girl Scout cookies not created equally

**By Mike Pomranz, Food + Wine**

Here's a dirty little secret the Girl Scouts don't want you to know: Not all Girl Scout cookies taste the same. And I'm not talking about how Samoas taste delicious, whereas Do-Si-Dos taste like someone rubbed your tongue with peanut butter sandpaper. I mean that the exact same cookie can look and taste differently in different parts of the country.

Those in the know have been aware all along that Girl Scout cookies are made by two different bakeries.

The Girls Scouts of America doesn't try to hide this fact too much: It's listed under each individual cookie on their

website. But from there, the story blurs a bit.

In some places, they admit that “recipes and ingredients may differ slightly” between cookies made by the two licensed bakeries – which, for the record, are ABC Bakers (based in Richmond, Va.) and Little Brownie Bakers (located in Louisville, Ky., and owned by parent company Kellogg’s). However, some cookies have different names depending on where they’re produced. For those varieties, the Girl Scouts say, regardless of the name, “it’s still the delicious cookie you’ve grown to love.”

**Read the whole story**

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# ‘Sugar papers’ show industry’s influence on dental program

**By Lisa Aliferis, California Report**

Hundreds of pages of newly-found documents show that the sugar industry worked closely with the federal government in the late 1960s and early 1970s to determine a research agenda to prevent cavities in children, researchers who analyzed the documents say.

In the analysis, published Wednesday in the journal PLOS Medicine, researchers concluded that industry influence starting in the late 1960s helped steer the National Institute of Dental Research, part of the National Institutes of Health, away from addressing the question of determining a safe level of sugar.

“What this paper has shown is that our (NIH) was working toward potentially answering that question,” said Cristin Kearns, a fellow at UC San Francisco and lead author of the analysis, “and the sugar industry derailed them from doing the research to help to answer that question, so we’re still debating (it) here in 2015.”

Kearns uncovered the 1,551 pages of documents at a public archive at the University of Illinois.

The documents show that an expert panel formed by the sugar industry included all but one member of the government panel that was examining priorities for research.

**Read the whole story**