

The Definition of 3.2 Beer

Wonder what "3.2" beer is? Well, MillerCoors gives a detailed answer in their "Frequently Asked Questions" webpage.

How Is the Alcohol Content in Beer Measured?

Alcohol content in beer is typically measured in one of two ways: by volume (which is most common) or by weight. Using Coors as an example: A 12-ounce serving contains 5.0 percent alcohol by volume which means that of all the liquid in the container, 5.0 percent of the liquid is alcohol. The same 12-oz. serving of Coors Light is about 4.0 percent alcohol by weight, which means that of the total weight of the liquid in the container, 4.0 percent of the weight is contributed by the alcohol.

Sounds simple, but if we're talking about the exact same serving of beer, why the difference between volume and weight measurements? That's because a given volume of alcohol weighs less than the same volume of water. (An ethyl alcohol molecule, or C_2H_5OH , is larger than a molecule of water, or H_2O , and takes up more space.) So whatever the serving size, the alcohol weight percentage will always be smaller than the volume percentage. This basic fact should help dispel any myth about 3.2 beers or so-called "near-beers" allegedly containing much less alcohol compared to regular beers. The "3.2" in 3.2 beers represents the percentage of alcohol by weight, which means that there's about 4 percent alcohol by volume in the beer. Anyone who believes that he or she cannot become intoxicated consuming 3.2 beer is just plain wrong. If you know of anyone who's a believer in the 3.2 beer "myth," do him or her a favor and share the facts.

"Frequently Asked Questions," MillerCoors, Accessed April 8, 2012 from <http://www.millercoors.com/FAQs.aspx>.