

Five things to know: Alcohol calorie labels on menus

December 17 2014, by Mary Clare Jalonick

Want to know how many calories are in that alcoholic drink you're about to order? You [might be able to find out just by reading](#) the menu.

Five things to know about the Food and Drug Administration's new menu labeling rules, which will require chain restaurants with 20 or more outlets to list the amount of [calories](#) in alcoholic drinks, along with other foods and beverages, on menus by next November

YOU WON'T FIND THE CALORIE LABELS EVERYWHERE

The FDA rules apply to drinks listed on the menu but not those ordered at the bar. The FDA said it would be too difficult to try to label calories in mixed drinks that are made differently from restaurant to restaurant.

Individual calorie amounts won't be on wine lists, either. The FDA is allowing restaurants to estimate calories and ranges. That means menus are required to list the average amount of calories in a glass of red or white wine, but won't have to list calories by brand unless they want to. Same with beers and spirits.

A FIRST STEP

Public health advocates say the new menu labeling rules for alcohol are a welcome first step.

Margo Wootan of the Center for Science in the Public Interest said

people will want more nutritional labeling for alcohol as they get used to it. "Most of the time when people have a drink they have absolutely no idea what its caloric impact is," Wootan says.

INDUSTRY REACTION IS MIXED

The wine industry and craft brewers associations, both representing many smaller companies, said they are pleased the rules allow for estimated calorie counts, so companies won't have to pay to have their products' nutritional content analyzed—for now, at least.

The regulations "could have a slight chilling effect" on small breweries if some restaurants decide to list calories for individual beers, said Paul Gatz of the Brewers Association, which represents craft breweries.

The rules could have advantages, too, Gatz said, if the added information helps consumers feel more connected to the brands.

WHAT ABOUT BOTTLES AND CANS?

For years, most alcohol companies have tried to put off mandatory bottle and can nutrition labeling as public health advocates have fought for it. Rules proposed by Treasury's Alcohol and Tobacco Trade and Tax Bureau in 2007 would have made such labels mandatory. But they were never made final.

Last year, the bureau said for the first time that beer, wine and spirits companies could use labels that include serving size, servings per container, calories, carbohydrates, protein and fat per serving. The labels are voluntary and will probably be used mostly by liquor companies touting low calories and low carbohydrates in their products.

WHAT'S ON PACKAGE LABELS NOW

Wines containing 14 percent or more alcohol by volume must list [alcohol content](#). Wines that are 7 percent to 14 percent alcohol by volume may list alcohol content or put "light" or "table" wine on the label. "Light" beers must list calorie and carbohydrate content. Liquor must list percent [alcohol](#) content by volume and may also list proof, a measure of alcoholic strength.

Wine, beer and liquor manufacturers don't have to list ingredients but must list substances people might be sensitive to, such as sulfites, certain food colorings and aspartame.

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