

Make calorie labels compulsory on all alcoholic drinks, says public health expert

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Calorie counts should be mandatory on all alcoholic drinks as a matter of urgency, argues a leading public health doctor in *The BMJ* this week.

Fiona Sim, Chair of the Royal Society for Public Health, says alcoholic drinks contribute to obesity and the law "should require [restaurant menus](#) and labels to make energy content explicit in addition to [alcohol content](#)."

She explains that, since 2011, packaged foods in the European Union have been subject to regulation requiring labelling with their ingredients and [nutritional information](#), including energy content (calories). But

drinks that contain more than 1.2% alcohol by volume are exempt and consumers do not know what is in them.

And she points out that a European Commission report to consider exclusions from the regulation, including calorie labelling of alcoholic drinks, "is now several months overdue, and no revised publication date has been announced."

Among adults who drink, an estimated 10% of their daily calorie intake comes from alcohol, writes Sim. Yet a recent survey found that 80% of the 2,117 adults questioned did not know the calorie content of common drinks, and most were completely unaware that alcohol contributed to the total calories that they consumed.

"Most women, for example, do not realise that two large glasses of wine, containing 370 calories, comprise almost a fifth of their daily recommended energy intake, as well as containing more than the recommended daily limit of alcohol units," she explains.

Many respondents were also in favour of calorie labelling on alcoholic drinks.

Some [alcoholic drink](#) manufacturers have already begun to introduce nutritional labelling, which suggests there is no commercial disadvantage in such a move, says Sim. However, she warns that information provided to consumers must be "accurate, prominent, and meaningful."

The US Food and Drug Administration has mandated calorie labelling on alcoholic drinks from December 2015 in US restaurant chains with 20 or more outlets, she writes. On this side of the Atlantic the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill 2015 will, if passed, make Ireland the first EU country to insist on calorie labelling on alcoholic drinks.

Finally, she says, those of us in clinical practice regularly ask patients about their weight, eating habits, and exercise in the context of primary or secondary prevention, but how many of us routinely ask about their calories from alcohol?

It is time that we started, she concludes.

More information: Personal View: Alcoholic drinks contribute to obesity and should come with mandatory calorie counts , The *BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.h2047

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