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Calories we forget to count- alcoholic drinks

On the European Obesity Day (17th May), Eurocare warns people not to let extra calories sneak up on them through calorific alcoholic drinks.

Weight gain is a major concern for many people, based on the latest estimates in European Union countries; overweight affects 30-70% and obesity affects 10-30% of adultsⁱ, however little attention is placed on the calories contained in alcohol-based beverages.

Unlike other food products alcoholic drinks are not required to provide any information to consumers on the number of calories or any other ingredients they contain.ⁱⁱ

Some studies in the US have found that men consume around 8 210 kilocalories from alcohol a month and women 3 790ⁱⁱⁱ

Being high in sugar means alcohol contains a considerable number of calories, with energy content of 7.1 kilocalories per gram, only fat has higher energy value per gram (9kcal/g). Studies in the UK have shown that alcohol accounts for nearly 10% of the calorie intake amongst adults who drink.^{iv}

Drinking alcohol reduces the amount of fat the body burns for energy. While nutrients, protein, carbohydrates and fat can be stored in the body, alcohol cannot. Therefore, the body system wants to get rid of it and it takes priority; all of the other processes that should be taking place including absorbing nutrients and burning fat are interrupted.

Many people forget to include alcoholic drinks when watching what they eat. It is easy for calories from alcohol to add up quickly and unnoticed. Alcohol is also an appetite stimulant and can lead to overeating at mealtimes and late at night.

Mariann Skar, Secretary General in the European Alcohol Policy Alliance (Eurocare) advocates for allowing consumers to make informed choices, and says: *“Providing the energy value would allow consumers to monitor their diets better and make it easier to keep a healthy lifestyle. It is really perplexing why European decisions makers have excluded alcoholic drinks from the requirement to list their content and have refused consumers their right to know what is in their drinks”*

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EUROCARE (The European Alcohol Policy Alliance) is an alliance of non-governmental and public health organisations with around 55 member organisations across 24 European countries advocating the prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm in Europe. www.eurocare.org

ⁱ World Health Organisation Europe, as retrieved from: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/obesity/data-and-statistics>

ⁱⁱ Alcohol has been exempted from the obligation to provide allergens and ingredients listing on their products from EU Regulation 1169/2011 on the provision of food information to consumers.

ⁱⁱⁱ Tujague j. and Kerr W. C. (2009) Metabolic effects: Energy Intake Estimates of Respondent-Measured Alcoholic beverages. Alcohol and Alcoholism Vol. 44 No 1 pp.34-41

^{iv} Bates B, Alison Lennox in Obesity and alcohol; an overview (2012) National Obesity Observatory, NHS