

How calories from alcohol affect weight

Did you know that in the United Kingdom alcohol makes up around 10% of calories consumed by adult drinkers (and 16% of calories for drinkers in the United States)? Add the fact that many people are unclear about the amount of calories contained in alcohol, and it



should come as no surprise that alcohol consumption has been linked as a risk factor for weight gain.

Research published in the *American Journal of Public Health* sought to understand if a link could be established between obesity and the consumption of calories from alcohol.

Method

Data for this research was collected from the Health Survey for England (2006). Adults who consumed alcohol in the previous week were asked to estimate the number, size and type of alcoholic drinks consumed on their heaviest day of drinking. That information was then used to calculate an estimated number of calories from alcohol. Weight and height details were used to calculate body mass index (BMI). In total 7,030 participants were identified from the survey data set.

Results

Analysis revealed that men consumed an estimated average of 677 calories on their heaviest drinking day (or 27% of recommended daily calorie allowance). On their heaviest drinking day, women consumed an estimated average of 382 calories from alcohol, or 19% of their recommended daily calorie allowance.

Further analysis of body mass index and alcohol consumption revealed that increased consumption of alcohol calories increased the likelihood of obesity.

Hidden alcohol calories and mixers

It is possible that alcohol and obesity may be linked a result of the large number of calories hidden in alcoholic beverages. However, it is also possible that the calorie content of mixers is a factor in weight gain. (The calorie content of mixers was not considered as part of this study.)

Variation in alcohol consumption patterns

Other research has shown that drinkers in the United States obtain a greater proportion of energy from alcohol than their counterparts from the United Kingdom. This may be explained by the increased consumption of beer and spirits in the United States. Beer and spirits have been more closely linked to the risk of obesity than other types of alcoholic beverages.

Overall, this research confirms a link between consumption of calories from alcohol and obesity. The authors recommend that further investigation is undertaken to establish if there is a link between alcohol consumption and other chronic health conditions.

Reference: Shelton, N. J., & Knott, C. S. (2014). Association between alcohol calorie intake and overweight and obesity in English adults. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(4), 629–631.

Have you ever analysed and discussed calories from alcohol with your clients? Are they aware of the amount of calories in the alcohol they consume?