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AUSTRALIANS FOOLED BY LOW CARB BEER MYTHS: SURVEY

Health groups urge caution with low carb alcohol products over the summer party season

Research by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) reveals low carbohydrate beer drinkers mistakenly believe these products are healthier and will keep the kilos off – and that they still binge as much as other drinkers.

The results of a national survey to measure attitudes and behaviours of low carb beer drinkers* were released today, in the lead up to office parties and the festive season, a time when many health conscious drinkers opt for low carb beer.

More than two-thirds (71%) of those surveyed said they believe low carb beer is healthier than full strength beer, despite both types containing the same level of alcohol, which is high in kilojoules.

And 15 per cent said they consume *more beer* when drinking the low carb variety in the belief that it is healthier for them.

- More than a third (38%) believe low carb beer is *healthier than light beer*.
- 13% of low carb beer drinkers *binge drink*, which is the same level as binge drinking across the broader Australian population.
- 44% who drink low carb beer believe it is *less fattening*, despite no reliable evidence this is true.

To see the full results, download the low carb beer survey fact sheet from www.vichealth.vic.gov.au

VicHealth chief executive officer Todd Harper says the health myths about low carb are dangerous and in some cases, lead people to drink more in the mistaken belief these drinks are better for weight control.

“For those watching their waistlines over the holidays, the truth is, low carb beers won’t help,” Mr Harper said. “This is because they contain almost as many kilojoules and just as much alcohol as regular beer.

“Beer doesn’t contain a lot of carbs to begin with. For example, a can of soft drink contains four times more carbohydrates than a stubby of full strength beer** It’s the alcohol that contributes most to weight gain from drinking beer, not the carbohydrate.”

Mr Harper added that it was particularly concerning that one in three people thought low carb beer was healthier than light beer.

“Carbs or no carbs, alcohol can still be harmful for your health. The more you drink, the greater your risk of accidents and injuries, and developing liver disease, cancer, stroke, brain damage and dementia,” he said.

Australian Drug Foundation CEO John Rogerson said: “As the industry introduces more of these varieties to the market for summer, we need to warn Australians that low carb beer is a marketing ploy designed to mislead people into thinking they’ve made a healthy choice. If you’re worried about your health and your weight but still want to have a drink, choose lower alcohol beer instead.”

Introduced to Australia around 2004, low carb beers now make up 8.8 per cent of the market share, and are popular with men and women of all ages.

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* VicHealth national online survey of awareness, attitudes and behaviours of 503 Australian low carb beer drinkers, conducted July 2010.

** One 375ml can of cola drink contains 39.8g of carbohydrate. A 375ml full-strength beer has around 10g of carbohydrate and one 375ml low carb beer has around 3.5g of carbohydrate.

Note: Binge drinking is defined as 7+ standard drinks for men and 5+ for women on any one day.