



... Because health matters!

Nutrition Matters

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The Alcohol Illusion



Am I getting less alcohol and calories when I have a wine cooler?

Is “light” beer low in calories?

People are changing what they eat and drink in order to look and feel better. Producers of alcoholic drinks know that Canadians are becoming more health conscious and have developed drinks to fit this healthy image. The wide variety of coolers, “light” beers and “spritzer” type drinks available in the liquor stores is evidence of this trend. By switching to these drinks, we may think we are changing our drinking habits. However, we are still drinking high calorie, alcoholic drinks. Let’s look at the alcoholic, caloric, and nutritional content of these new drinks.

- Alcohol is alcohol whether it is in the form of beer, spirits, wine or a cooler. The effect of alcohol in your body is the same no matter where it comes from. You may think you are getting less alcohol when you choose a cooler or “light” beer but this may not be the case.
- Alcohol has more calories, ounce for ounce, than either protein or carbohydrate and only slightly less than fat. Additional calories come from the sugars and starches in beer and wine, the sweeteners in liqueurs and coolers, or the

soft drinks used as mixers. The following table “what is in a drink?” shows the amount of alcohol by volume and the caloric content of a variety of popular drinks.

- Vitamins and minerals are low in all alcoholic drinks. Beer contains very low amounts of B vitamins.

What is in a drink?

	% Alcohol	Calories
Regular/Draft Beer (341 ml)	4 - 5.5	140 - 150
Light Beer (341 ml)	1.1 - 4	60 - 140
Cooler-wine, beer, spirit (12 oz)	3 - 7	120 - 200
Light Cooler (12 oz)	3.5 - 5	90 - 135
Wine (5-1/2 oz)	11 - 14	110 - 130
Liquor (1-1/2 oz)	40	110 - 130
Liquor & soft drink (1-1/2 oz & 6 oz mix)	8	180 - 230

What is light about “light” beer?

There is a wide variety of “light” and even “extra light” beers available today. In order for a beer to be called “light” it must have no more than 4% alcohol by volume.

As you can see from the chart, the alcohol content and calorie saving of a “light” beer at 4% alcohol, is not very different from most regular beers at 5%! When you drink “light” beer you only need 1/5th of bottle more to get the same amount of alcohol that is in a bottle of regular beer. When you drink an “extra light” beer that is 2% alcohol, it takes 2-1/2 bottles to get the same amount of alcohol as one regular beer. But, you may be packing in the calories. The caloric content of the “extra light” beers may not be 2-1/2 times lower.

What is in a cooler?

Coolers contain alcohol blended with a variety of other ingredients. Coolers may contain fruit juices, carbonated water, citrus or other flavours, sugar and spices. Although you may believe coolers are “healthier” - they really have no benefits over other alcoholic drinks. Coolers look like soft drinks and they are promoted like soft drinks. Refreshing, cool, trendy, they appeal to the generation raised on “soft drinks”. The fruity taste and the milder kick may lead you to believe that you can drink them freely. You get as much alcohol in a 12 oz. cooler as you do in a shot (1-1/2 oz) of gin and tonic. Coolers have as much, if not more calories than a regular soft drink. When you choose a “light” cooler, you may be deceived that you are getting less alcohol and calories. While some or all of the sugar may be replaced by aspartame - low calorie sugar substitute - the calorie saving, in the end, may not be very great. Depending on your choice of “light” cooler (wine, beer or spirit) you are still getting 3% - 5% alcohol.

Don't Let the Numbers Fool You ...

You can get the **same amount of alcohol** whether you drink:

- 1 bottle (12 oz) Beer
- 1 1/5 bottles (14.4 oz) “Light” beer (4% alcohol)
- 1 bottle (12 oz) of cooler (wine, spirit or beer with 5% alcohol)
- 1 glass (5 oz) table wine
- 1 glass (3 oz) sherry
- 1 shot (1-1/2 oz) liquor (rye, gin, rum or scotch)

The portion size usually varies with the type of alcoholic drink we choose, but the total amount of alcohol comes out the same. If this surprises you, here are some things you can do to ...

Create your own illusion:

- Sip slowly and enjoy the drink you have chosen. Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.
- Dilute your drink with lots of juice or a non-caloric mixer like soda water. It makes your drink last longer, and reduces your alcoholic intake.
- If you feel like “having a drink” and don't want an alcoholic beverage, have a glass filled with orange or tomato juice, tonic water or club soda with a slice of lemon or lime.

