



Centre for **Public Health**

Faculty of **Health and Applied Social Sciences**

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How to Eat, Drink and be Healthy in 2010

Tackling obesity and alcohol misuse means reconnecting the food and drink agendas

Despite obesity and alcohol being two of the biggest threats to public health, people are often unaware of the health links between food and alcohol, with little or no public information on how alcohol consumption affects food cravings (*the kebab effect*), whether eating reduces drunkenness, and how both eating and drinking in excess increase risks of developing major diseases. A new report, *Alcohol and Food: Making the Public Health Connections*, released today by the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University, explores these issues and argues for better information and more policy connections between food and alcohol.

Key findings from the report include:

- Drinking alcohol can affect levels of hunger and food preferences. Cravings for food when drinking (e.g. kebab and chips) or for a fry up the morning after add to people's risks of weight gain and obesity.
- People on diets may risk harms from substituting alcohol for more nutritious foods in order to stay within calorie limits without sacrificing their drinking. Most alcoholic drinks contain virtually no vitamins or minerals despite old wives' tales (e.g. that some are high in iron).
- Eating food before or while drinking alcohol may reduce rates of alcohol absorption and immediate risks of drunkenness. However, such knowledge can be abused in an "*eating is cheating*" approach with people avoiding food to get drunk faster or eating as a way to consume greater quantities of alcohol without getting drunk.

- Two large glasses of white wine equate to almost a fifth of a woman's daily calorie requirements whilst three pints of lager equate to about a fifth of a man's. However, public awareness of the calorie content of alcohol is relatively low while most alcohol products are exempt from food labelling regulations so do not have to show calorie contents.
- Many major health problems relate to over consumption of both alcohol and food. These include: liver disease; breast, colon, liver and stomach cancer; and cardiovascular disease. However, there is relatively little understanding of how poor diet, combined with excessive drinking increases such health risks.
- Some specific food types affect risks of alcohol-related disease. For instance, drinking coffee appears to reduce the risk of developing alcoholic liver cirrhosis; although it is neither a substitute for, or as effective as, reducing alcohol consumption.

Supermarkets (through meal deals and selling alcohol as a loss leader), bars (through selling salty snacks which can increase thirst) and restaurants all take advantage of the links between alcohol and food in order to boost sales. Public Health measures need to be based on a better understanding of these links in order to ensure that people can make informed choices about alcohol and food consumption, and how together these affect their health.

Professor Mark Bellis, Director, Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University and co-author of the report, said: "Whether it's craving junk food on a night out, dropping nutritious food from a diet in favour of alcohol or increasing your risk of cancers through excessive food and drink consumption, people need to understand the health links between food and alcohol."

"All too often policy and public understanding in the UK miss clear links between the challenges of unhealthy diets and unhealthy alcohol consumption. Reconnecting food and alcohol in policy and in people's minds will help individuals make better decisions about their diet and protect them from commercial pressures which exploit these connections in order to increase sales."



Dr Ruth Hussey OBE, Regional Director of Public Health for the North West, said: “Obesity and alcohol misuse are two of the biggest contributors to ill health nationally and ones that substantially affect individuals in the North West of England. People frequently need help with both these aspects of their lifestyles and we need to ensure that services help people to understand the connections between them.”

Michela Morleo, lead author of the report and Alcohol Research Manager at the Centre for Public Health, said: “At this time of year, people try to make positive choices about dieting and following healthier lifestyles. A greater awareness of links between alcohol and food could mean adopting a healthier diet and having a greater chance of sticking to it. Links between alcohol and food are a largely neglected subject in the UK but one that could be used effectively to promote healthier lifestyle choices.”

Notes to Editors

- The Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University specialises in applied research and educational programmes which address health issues, from policy development to service delivery (www.cph.org.uk).
- *The final report - Alcohol and Food: Making the Public Health Connection will be available at www.cph.org.uk/publications.aspx on 6th January 2010. For a pre-publication copy please contact Gemma Parry (details below).*

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**For further information or a pre-publication copy of the report, please contact:
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**Due to weather conditions the office may be closed – in which case please
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