



EBCU Press Release about Nutri-Score labelling of alcohol; 21 February 2022

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European Beer Consumers' Union

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The Nutri-Score and its relation to health and well-being: A holistic view

Health and well-being are among a society's top priorities. Undeniably, good nutrition is a major factor in preventing some health issues, and it is a source of well-being. The European Union faces a huge challenge in dealing with diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCD) such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, stroke and various chronic diseases. Actually, unhealthy diets leading to malnutrition are major drivers for NCD, including lethal types of cancer. The overweight rate within the EU's population was estimated at 52.7% of the adults in 2019, with rapidly increasing numbers, and systematic programs that aim to reduce this rate are urgently needed. Joint efforts and holistic approaches are required to establish healthy diets and guarantee a sustained global implementation.

Science can help us understand how to reduce the risks for diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCD). Besides physical activity, which is an important basis for all health-oriented measures, healthy diets are key to preventing NCD. Modern lifestyle, however, is characterized by convenience nutrition, which mainly consists of ultra-processed foods and drinks. These are typically high in calories, salt, sugar and fat but show low nutrient scores—they also contain many preservatives and artificial colorization. Convenience nutrition thus negatively affects the consumers' health. At the same time, it impacts the social aspects of eating and drinking: Instead of taking time to cook and enjoy a meal together, we tear open the packaging and eat down quickly.

The European Commission recommends the usage of a simple nutritional rating system, called Nutri-Score, to fight malnutrition in the EU. The system calculates a nutritional score for each product which is then indicated by an easy-to-read 5-Color-Nutrition label ranging from A to E. Products with an A-rating are highly recommended, while products with an E-rating are not recommended. The formula for calculating the score is transparent and easy to apply; in short, the score involves seven different parameters of nutrient information per 100g. The employed parameters are based on scientific pieces of evidence compiled by the French public health agency, which originated from major works by an epidemiologist from the University of Paris-Nord.

Unfortunately, the Nutri-Score only covers main ingredients like sodium and fat but neglects factors like artificial additives, substitutes and preservatives. The Nutri-Score also neglects



that a healthy diet should not be based on pre-produced and ultra-processed products which have been identified to cause NCD themselves. Short-cut indicators like the Nutri-Score will furthermore reduce the effort to engage in reflected and sustainable nutrition, thus disturbing basic knowledge about and contact to natural, raw ingredients and the skills to process them. Last but not least, the Nutri-Score ignores epidemiological data about culturally-related health. Mediterranean cuisine, for instance, is marked by extensive use of olive oil, which is typically labelled with a Nutri-Score “C”. Such labelling results in a systematic devaluation of Mediterranean cuisine, which is unjustified as this way of cooking actually provides a healthy diet with a balanced use of plant food and minimally processed staples. Further, epidemiological data from France do not show a positive impact of the Nutri-Score on diet-related health issues: Though, in 2017, France was the first country to introduce the Nutri-Score, the growth rate of the proportion of overweight has been constant for the last 30 years—like in most neighbor countries.

Epidemiological data tells us that people with lower education are more vulnerable to NCD. Education about dietary issues does not end at the gates of home, but is very much needed in schools and must also be provided by governmental programs. Alcoholic beverages have to be included in such considerations as well. It is not to be disputed that alcohol consumption shows adverse cellular and mitochondrial effects, so warnings and campaigning against heavy alcohol consumption are important. At the same time, educational programs could contribute to modest consumption by informing about the social and cultural aspects of drinking, and by stimulating a reflection on the quality of different alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. This kind of reflection is bypassed by the Nutri-Score: It is proposed to principally label alcoholic beverages as “F” in the extended Nutri-Score scale, without any differentiation of beverages with a lower alcohol content, such as beer, and high-proof liquors. The usage of a label with an “F”, which also stands for “Failed” in many contexts will stigmatize any kind of consumption, independent of the amount, the quality and the alcohol level as “lethal” or extremely unhealthy. This lack of differentiation will most probably not lead to a more reflected consumption of alcohol. Seeing the “F” on the packaging, many people will not care about other qualities of the content anymore. They will not ask: How much alcohol does it contain? Is it of regional origin? Is it handcrafted or has it been industrially produced? Does it contain any nutrients or additives? ... Some people might indeed switch to non-alcoholic alternatives with a more favorable Nutri-Score label, such as soft drinks with reduced or no calories. The reduction of calories in these beverages, however, is achieved by replacing sugar with, e.g., Aspartame, an ingredient which can have negative long-term health effects, if consumed in large quantities.

Overall, it has to be underlined that an oversimplifying system such as the Nutri-Score can not solve diet-related health issues. Cultural knowledge, contextual embedment and specific education about ingredients and preparation methods are fundamental to healthier nutrition



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of the public in the long run. We will gain better health and higher well-being in a socially and culturally appealing world by respecting diverse, high-quality and authentic products.

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Notes to editors:

The European Beer Consumers Union is a consumer organisation which gives voice to the beer consumer at the European level, both within and beyond the European Union. Membership of EBCU is open to all non-exclusive national organisations of beer consumers.

EBCU has member organisations in Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

More information is available at www.ebcu.org

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