



Sobering truth of 'healthy alcohol'

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HEALTH experts have slammed the alcohol industry for marketing drinks under a “health halo” because it misleads consumers into thinking booze is good for you.

Vegan wines, low-carb beers and sugar-free pre-mixed spirits are being promoted as healthier ways to imbibe.

The move follows research showing Aussies are switching to perceived healthier drink alternatives at a rapid rate, ditching soft drinks for soda water and kombucha, which is now being used as a pre-mixer for alcoholic drinks.

Advertised “healthy” alternatives for drinkers now include low-carb and gluten-free beers and cider-blended soda water, which is marketed at being half a standard drink.

Nielsen 2019 statistics show 4.3 million Aussies believe there are positive benefits to drinking beer and 28 per cent view beer as a “natural product” while five million Aussies

said it was important to them that wine is additive- and preservative-free.

Health researcher Julia Stafford of the WA Public Health Advocacy Institute wants governments to intervene and put a stop to “health halo” alcohol advertising.

“It’s a really big concern that alcohol companies are trying to make drinks look healthier when really it’s the alcohol content of these products that is the major health

concern,” she said. “It doesn’t matter what you put with it, all the risks that come with consuming alcohol stay the same ... intoxication, violence, injuries, drink-driving and, longer term, risks of heart disease, cancer, stroke and chronic health conditions.”

Ms Stafford said mixing alcohol with a healthy mixer did not make the drink healthy.

Kombucha, fermented tea used to improve digestion and immunity, is increasingly being used in bars and at home

as a drink mixer, but Ms Stafford said it lost any potential health benefit once a shot of booze was added.

But Andrew Buttery, the head of sales of Australian kombucha brand MOJO, said kombucha did not lose its effectiveness when mixed with alcohol.

“The addition of alcohol does not negatively influence the ability of our (probiotics) to reach your gut alive, where its colony-forming units activate to support your gut health,” he said. “Anyone wanting to retain the potential health benefits of kombucha with the addition of alcohol should be sure to look for chilled brands containing a well-researched probiotic strain.”

He said drinkers were choosing “quality over quantity” when they mixed with kombucha and stressed that it was important for consumers to read the label and only use brands with proven probiotics for gut health.