

Fermented drinks and alcohol

Fermented or brewed soft drinks are an expanding category in the Australian beverages industry. Fermented drinks, such as kombucha, ginger beer, kefir and kvass, can contain low levels of alcohol as a by-product of fermentation.

Definition of brewed soft drink

Under the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code (the Code) Standard 2.6.2-2:

A **brewed soft drink** means a food that:

- (a) is the product prepared by a fermentation process from water with sugar and one or more of:
 - i. fruit extractives or infusions; or
 - ii. vegetable extractives or infusions; and
- (b) contains no more than 1.15% alcohol by volume (ABV).

Alcohol labeling

The Code requires drinks that contain more than 0.5% alcohol by volume (ABV) to have a statement of alcohol content on the label.

The majority of state and territory food regulators, under their Liquor Acts, define liquor as being a beverage that contains more than 1.15% ethanol by volume. However, in Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria, beverages containing more than 0.5% alcohol by volume are considered alcoholic (or a liquor). The need for producers to be familiar with the various legislation where products are sold is important.

Drinks that contain more than 0.5% or 1.15% ABV (depending on the jurisdiction) must include a statement that indicates the volume of alcohol as a percentage of the total volume of the beverage and the number of standard drinks. A standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol.

Survey of fermented drinks and alcohol content

A recent nationally coordinated survey by food regulators found that many fermented brewed soft drinks (such as kombucha, ginger beer, kefir, kvass) contained alcohol,

and were found to be non-compliant with alcohol labelling requirements.

For the kombucha samples tested, around 65% had more than 0.5% alcohol, and for water-based kefir samples tested 74% had more than 0.5% alcohol. The dairy-based kefir samples tested all had less than 0.5% alcohol. Ginger beer and kvass samples tested had around 31% with more than 0.5% alcohol.

Why is there alcohol in brewed soft drinks?

During the brewing process of these types of soft drinks, alcohol is produced. If the process is uncontrolled, inaccuracies in alcohol measurement and/or incorrect transport and storage of these brewed soft drinks can result in excess production of alcohol and incorrect labelling of alcohol content on the drink.

Who is affected by drinking alcohol?

Some groups should not drink alcohol while others may not wish to drink alcohol for a variety of reasons.

This includes children, and women who are pregnant or breast feeding. People who have certain medical conditions, take prescription medication or intend to drive a vehicle should be aware that drinking fermented drinks will increase their blood alcohol concentration.

The National Health and Medical Research Council advises that healthy men and women should drink no more than two standard drinks any day. Not drinking alcohol is the safest option for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding and for those under 18 years of age.

Fast facts

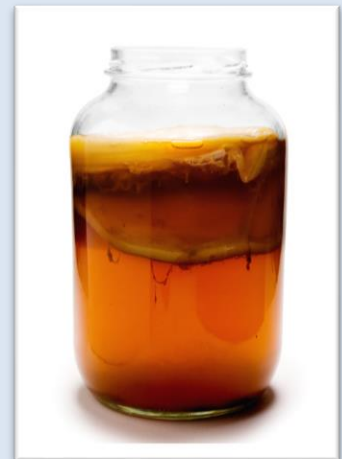
What are fermented drinks?

Fermented drinks include kombucha, ginger beer, kvass and kefir.

Kombucha is produced from a mixture of steeped tea and sugar, combined with a culture of yeast strains and bacteria. Some kombucha drinks also have fruit juice or other flavours added during production.

Kefir can be produced from milk (or a dairy alternative such as soy milk), water or coconut water.

Kvass is a traditional fermented Slavic beverage commonly made from rye bread.



For more information

FSANZ, [Labelling of Alcoholic Beverages User Guide](#), 2014

NSW Health, [Fermented drinks and alcohol fact sheet](#), 2019

Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation, [Brewed soft drinks and undeclared alcohol article](#), 2019

Victoria State Government Health and Human Services, [Some soft drinks may contain alcohol. A guide for retailers for the sale of brewed and fermented soft drinks fact sheet](#), 2019.