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Most Britons who drink alcohol-free beer still drink alcohol, study finds

The research suggests pubgoers are increasingly alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic pints instead of abstaining altogether.

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Most people in Britain who drink alcohol-free beer also drink alcohol, according to new research that points to a shift in how consumers use no- and low-alcohol products on a night out.

The study, conducted by KAM Insight with Athletic, found that 94% of alcohol-free beer drinkers also consume alcohol. It also found that only 27% of social drinkers now stick exclusively to alcoholic beer when they go out.

The data suggests that moderation is increasingly taking the form of alternating between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks rather than giving up alcohol altogether. That pattern, often called “zebra striping,” is already showing up clearly in the British pub trade. KAM Insight and Athletic said 48% of Britons are already alternating between alcohol-free and alcoholic drinks when they visit the pub.

The findings also point to broader acceptance of alcohol-free beer in mainstream drinking occasions. According to the research, 56% of Britons believe alcohol-free beer is becoming mainstream in the United Kingdom. The same share, 56%, said they are already drinking alcohol-free beer in pubs and bars.

Perceptions of quality also appear to be changing. The study found that 60% of respondents now see alcohol-free beer as being as premium as a full-strength pint, a sign that choosing a non-alcoholic option is no longer widely viewed as a compromise on taste or status.

That matters for brewers, pubs, bars and retailers because it suggests demand for alcohol-free beer may be tied less to abstinence than to moderation. For operators deciding what to stock and how to build menus, the figures indicate that non-alcoholic beer can sit alongside traditional beer rather than replace it, potentially widening choice for customers who want to pace their drinking over the course of an evening.

Athletic, a U.S. non-alcoholic brewer, has been expanding its presence in Britain. The company recently secured listings with Whole Foods in the U.K. and with Wise Bartender, an online retailer focused on non-alcoholic drinks.

The research adds to a broader debate in the drinks industry over how alcohol-free products should be marketed. Laura Willoughby, founder of Club Soda, has argued that alcohol-free beer should be sold for what it offers rather than for what it lacks. In earlier comments about the category, she said such products should be treated as functional drinks and highlighted their potential health benefits.

Taken together, the figures suggest that for many British drinkers, alcohol-free beer is becoming part of the normal pub occasion instead of a niche alternative reserved for people avoiding alcohol entirely.