
Study Finds No Heart Benefit For Light Drinkers



Studies suggesting a cardiovascular benefit from the moderate consumption of alcohol are being questioned now that new research ties improved heart health to a reduction in alcohol intake, even in light to moderate drinkers. Blood pressure, Body Mass Index (BMI) and the risk of coronary heart disease all decrease when less alcohol is consumed. Results from the international, multi-centre study have been published in the BMJ.

The Glass Is Half Full

Observational data have implied that light-to-moderate drinking may be protective of cardiovascular health. Not surprisingly, many people indulge in an occasional alcoholic beverage (0.6 to 0.8 fluid ounces per day) believing that they are doing something good for their hearts. Heavy drinkers have been singled out as the only consumers of alcohol who do so with detrimental effects to their health.

In new research co-led by the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, scientists used an investigative approach to look at the relationship between alcohol intake and cardiovascular health. They examined over 50 previous studies, amounting to data from more than 260,000 people. They were specifically interested in individuals who had a variant of a gene related to lower alcohol consumption.

The Glass Is Half Empty

The findings of the new study contradict earlier reports of a protective effect of light-to-moderate alcohol use on heart health. A 17 percent reduction in weekly alcohol consumption was found to improve three health measures: coronary heart disease risk, blood pressure and BMI. Even people who consume light levels of alcohol benefit from drinking less on a weekly basis.

Those people who carry a gene tied to lower alcohol consumption over time had the best cardiovascular health records, on average, according to the authors. The 'alcohol dehydrogenase 1B' gene leads to a more rapid breakdown of alcohol, and causes those who carry the genetic marker to feel nauseous and have facial flushing. Over time, it leads to lower levels of alcohol consumption.

Alcohol and Cardiovascular Health

"These new results are critically important to our understanding of how alcohol affects heart disease. Contrary to what earlier reports have shown, it now appears that any exposure to alcohol has a negative impact upon heart health," said Michael Holmes, MD, PhD. Holmes is a co-lead author and research assistant professor in the Perelman School of Medicine's transplant surgery department.

The British Heart Foundation and the Medical Research Council provided funding for the study, which involved 155 researchers from Australia, North America, continental Europe and the UK.

[Source: BMJ](#)

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