

Daily Moderate Consumption of Beer or Other Alcohol Beverages May be Healthy

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The moderate, daily consumption of beer and other alcohol beverages can play a role in a healthful lifestyle and in reducing the risk of several serious diseases, including coronary heart disease, diabetes, obesity, cognitive disorders and osteoporosis, according to medical and scientific researchers who presented papers at a recent conference on the role of beer and alcohol in a healthful lifestyle.

The conference, “Beer: To Your Health!” convened by the University of Maryland Center for Food, Nutrition and Agriculture Policy (CFNAP), was the first of its kind in the United States to focus on the health benefits of beer.

“I was surprised to see how much research exists about the regular, moderate consumption of beer and other alcohol beverages and that there are many positive health benefits,” said Maureen L. Storey, PhD, director of CFNAP. “Some of the top researchers in the world on this topic provided very compelling evidence and agreed that the government and medical communities should consider stronger and more positive communications to the public.”

“Study after study has shown that moderate consumers of beer or other alcoholic beverages have much lower risks of coronary heart disease, as well as most other diseases of aging,” said Dr. R. Curtis Ellison, chief of the Section of Preventive Medicine and Epidemiology and director of the Institute on Lifestyle and Health at Boston University School of Medicine. “In fact it has been shown that the net effect of moderate

drinking in conjunction with four other components of a healthy lifestyle ...not-smoking, getting exercise, eating a healthy diet, not being obese... is a reduction of more than 80% in the risk of two of the major health problems of today- coronary heart disease and diabetes.”

Ellison also said that frequent drinking of alcoholic beverages, including daily, is preferable to drinking less often. But moderation is the key. “Heavy drinking and binge drinking, which can be defined as consuming more than 3 drinks in one to two hours, is an unhealthy way to drink.”

Ellison cited studies from Denmark and Switzerland that estimated that if everyone in the population was a moderate drinker, there would be many fewer deaths than if everyone abstained from alcohol. “We are not telling people to drink more (alcoholic beverages), but encouraging more people who do not have a contraindication to alcohol to drink small amounts on a regular basis,” Ellison added.

Other researchers reported:

- * Compared with nondrinkers, moderate drinkers of beer and other alcoholic beverages had a 33%-56% reduction in risk for diabetes, according to Andrea A. Howard, MD, MS of the Montefiore Medical Center at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, New York, while compared with moderate drinkers, heavy drinkers had up to a 43% greater risk.

- * Beer, a major source of the mineral dietary silicon, may have the unique property of preventing bone loss and rebuilding bone mass, according to Jonathan Powell, PhD, head of the Micronutrient Status Research Section at the MRC Centre in Cambridge, UK

- * Moderate alcohol intake is not associated with inadequate intake of macronutrients or micronutrients, or with overall dietary quality is a

conclusive statement of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, according to Theresa A. Nicklas, DrPH, professor, Baylor College of Medicine in Houston.

While the benefits of moderate consumption of red wine have been discussed for years, some of the researchers concluded that the health benefits of moderate consumption are primarily derived from the ethanol. Others seemed to think that fermented alcohol beverages like beer and wine have additional benefits due to the nutrient content like silicon or polyphenols.

Source: University of Maryland, College Park

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