

No need for reduced alcohol consumption in later life

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Provided they stick to the same guidelines about alcohol consumption as younger adults, regular moderate drinking poses no additional risks to the over 65s, and may even bring health benefits, according to two studies from the Peninsula Medical School in the South West of England.

Researchers assessed the drinking levels of over 13,000 older people in England and the US and looked at the effects on physical disability, mortality, cognitive function, depression, and well-being. They concluded that moderate drinking is fine for the over 65s – and in some cases is better than not drinking at all.

This will be good news to the elderly who want to get into the festive spirit, and who until now have lived by the commonly held belief that they have to reduce their alcohol consumption as they get older.

“We are not advocating that elderly people should go out and get ridiculously drunk,” said Dr. Iain Lang, lead author of the two studies from the Peninsula Medical School. “What we are saying is that current guidelines on drinking for the elderly are too conservative, and that a couple of drinks a day will do no harm, and will in fact have a more beneficial affect on cognitive and general health than abstinence.”

Research showed that 10.8 per cent of US men, 28.6 per cent of UK men, 2.9 per cent of US women and 10.3 per cent of UK women drank more than the US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

recommended limit for people aged 65 and over. The research also showed that those drinking on average more than one to two drinks a day achieved similar health results as those drinking on average more than zero to one drink a day. The worst results were in those who did not drink at all and in those who were heavy drinkers.

The shape of the relationship between alcohol consumption and the risk of disability were similar in men and women.

Said Dr. Lang: “The upshot of this research is that ‘a little of what you fancy does you good.’ There is no reason why older people should not enjoy a tipples this Christmas, as long as they are sensible about it. Previous research has shown that middle-aged people can benefit from moderate drinking – these findings show the same applies to the over-65s.”

Source: The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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