

# Moderate alcohol consumption in middle age can lower cardiac risk

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Previous studies have pointed out the benefits of moderate alcohol consumption as a factor in lowering cardiovascular risk. In a study conducted by the Department of Family Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina and published in the March 2008 issue of *The American Journal of Medicine*, researchers found that middle-aged non-drinkers who began consuming moderate amounts of alcohol saw an immediate benefit of lower cardiac disease morbidity with no change in mortality after four years.

Studying 7,697 people between 45 and 64 who were non-drinkers and who were participating in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) study over a 10 year period, the authors found that 6% began moderate alcohol consumption (1 drink per day or fewer for women and 2 drinks per day or fewer for men) during the follow-up period. After 4 years of follow-up, new moderate drinkers had a 38% lower chance of developing cardiovascular disease than did their non-drinking counterparts. Even after adjusting for physical activity, Body Mass Index, demographic and cardiac risk factors, this difference persisted.

The study also identified a subset of new drinkers who consumed only wine. When comparing non-drinkers to wine-only drinkers, drinkers of other types of alcohol, and heavy drinkers, the wine-only drinkers had the most significant reduction in cardiovascular events. Drinkers of other types of alcohol also had an advantage over non-drinkers, but the difference did not reach statistical significance.

Writing in the article, Dana E. King, MD, MS, states, “A substantial cardiovascular benefit from adopting moderate alcohol drinking in middle age appears supported by the current study. Any such benefit must be weighed with caution against the known ill consequences of alcohol consumption.

While caution is clearly warranted, the current study demonstrated that new moderate drinking lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease without an increase in mortality in a four-year follow up period. The findings suggest that, for carefully selected individuals, a ‘heart healthy diet’ may include limited alcohol consumption even among individuals who have not included alcohol previously.”

Source: Elsevier

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