

Drinking alcohol in moderation protects against heart disease: BMJ study

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Individuals who drink alcohol in moderation (about one drink a day or less) are 14-25% less likely to develop heart disease compared to those who drink no alcohol at all, finds research led by Professor William Ghali from the University of Calgary, published in the British Medical Journal today.

The first paper, led by Paul Ronksley from the University of Calgary, emphasises that a balance needs to be found between the public health message that consuming large amounts of [alcohol](#) is bad for you, and the one that drinking in moderation can have health benefits.

An accompanying paper led by Dr Susan Brien, also from the University of Calgary, finds that moderate consumption of alcohol (up to one drink or 15 g alcohol per day for women and up to two drinks or 30 g alcohol per day for men) is good for health. They say moderate amounts of alcohol significantly increase the levels of 'good' cholesterol circulating in the body and this has a protective effect against [heart disease](#).

Brien and colleagues argue that their study strengthens the case that there is a causal link between alcohol consumption and reduced heart disease.

The authors of both papers acknowledge that a number of previous studies have concluded that [moderate alcohol consumption](#) has been associated with a decrease in heart disease. However, they say that the research was out-of-date and there was a need for new material. Professor Ghali says his team's research is the most comprehensive to

date.

Ghali and colleagues reviewed 84 studies of alcohol consumption and heart disease. They compared alcohol drinkers with non-drinkers and their outcomes in relation to heart disease, death from heart disease, incidences of stroke and death from having a stroke.

In the companion study, Brien and colleagues reviewed 63 studies and investigated alcohol consumption with known physical markers for heart disease such as cholesterol, levels of inflammation, [fat cells](#) and the condition of blood vessels. They also assessed the impact of the type of alcohol consumed (wine, beer and spirits).

Interestingly, Brien's research concludes that it is the alcohol content that provides the health benefits not the type of alcoholic beverage (wine, beer or spirits) that is drunk.

Professor Ghali concludes that the debate between the impact of alcohol on heart disease should now centre "on how to integrate this evidence into clinical practice and public health messages".

He adds "with respect to public health messages there may now be an impetus to better communicate to the public that alcohol, in moderation, may have overall health benefits that outweigh the risks in selected subsets of patients ... any such strategy would need to be accompanied by rigorous study and oversight of impacts".

Provided by British Medical Journal

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