

Overall health effects of alcohol consumption

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has released its global status report on alcohol and health for 2011. Forum members largely agree with the discussion in the report of the serious health and societal problems associated with the misuse of alcohol, which contributes to accidents, many diseases, and premature deaths. On the other hand, Forum members were disturbed that the report was limited almost exclusively to abusive drinking, was based primarily on out-dated information, and suggested bias against alcohol. The report ignored a massive amount of scientific data indicating that in all developed countries, moderate consumers of alcohol are at much lower risk of essentially all of the diseases of ageing: coronary heart disease, ischemic stroke, diabetes, dementia, and osteoporosis. And conspicuously absent from the WHO report is a description of the decrease in total mortality among middle-aged and elderly people associated with moderate alcohol consumption, a finding that has been found consistently throughout the world.

Epidemiologic studies over many decades have shown that while excessive or irresponsible alcohol use has severe adverse health and societal effects, moderate drinking is associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease and other diseases of ageing. And a very large number of experimental studies, including results from human trials, have described biological mechanisms for the protective effects of both alcohol and the polyphenolic components of wine. A number of comprehensive meta-analyses are cited by Forum reviewers which they consider to provide much more accurate, up to date, and scientifically balanced views of the current "status" of the health effects of alcohol

consumption. Such documents are better sources of data upon which policy decisions should be based.

More information: Reference: Global status report on alcohol and health. World Health Organization 2011. ISBN 978 92 4 156415 1 (NLM classification: WM 274)

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