

Public divided on heart benefits from alcohol consumption

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Credit: Kevin Casper/public domain

In one of the first published studies using data from the Health eHeart Study, UCSF researchers have found that people are divided on the cardiovascular benefits of alcohol consumption. And, those who do perceive alcohol as "heart healthy" drink substantially more than their counterparts.

The study is in the Aug. 15 issue of *American Journal of Cardiology*.

"While we often hear about alcohol's effects, this is the first assessment to address how the public might use that information," said senior author Gregory Marcus, MD, MAS, director of clinical research in the UCSF Division of Cardiology.

Alcohol is the most commonly consumed U.S drug, according to the study researchers. While the harms of [alcohol abuse](#) related to physical and mental health have been established, there is debate regarding the cardiovascular health effects of moderate consumption. The researchers note that while few, if any, rigorous controlled trials have been conducted to determine alcohol's potential heart benefits, the media frequently portray alcohol as "heart healthy."

To determine people's perceptions of the [cardiovascular benefits](#) of alcohol, the source of those perceptions and how perceptions may influence behavior, Marcus and his colleagues conducted a cross-sectional analysis of data collected from participants enrolled in the Health eHeart Study between March 8, 2013, and Sept. 29, 2014.

The innovative [Health eHeart Study](#) harnesses the power of online and mobile technology to gather cardiovascular data from study participants through devices such as smartphone apps, ECG smartphone cases and portable [blood pressure cuffs](#). With a goal of one million participants, Health eHeart already has more than 20,000 people enrolled from around the world, with no study centers other than the one at UCSF.

Of the 5,582 Health eHeart Study participants who responded to questions on alcohol at the time of this analysis, 1,707 (30 percent) viewed alcohol as heart healthy, 2,157 (39 percent) viewed alcohol as unhealthy, and 1,718 (31 percent) were unsure. Of those reporting alcohol as heart healthy, 80 percent cited the lay press as a source of

their knowledge.

Further, those respondents who perceived alcohol as heart healthy were older, more often women, had higher levels of education and income, and more often resided in the United States. Compared to the rest of the cohort, they consumed, on average, 47 percent more alcohol. A vast majority of them also believe that red wine exclusively is beneficial.

Smokers and those with heart failure were less likely to view alcohol favorably.

"It is particularly interesting to note that those who believe alcohol to be heart healthy actually drink more alcohol," Marcus said. "Whether their belief causes this behavior, or merely justifies it, remains an interesting unknown. Future studies that perhaps assign different types of medical advice regarding alcohol may be very worthwhile and relevant to the great majority of our population - more than 80 percent of whom drink [alcohol](#)."

Provided by University of California, San Francisco

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