

Drinking in moderation - is it good for you?

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New research from Massey University is one of the first studies in the world to explore whether health benefits of drinking exist for older adults. Credit: Massey University

Moderate drinking is commonly assumed to be good for your health, but new research from Massey University's College of Health shows this might not be the case.

Researchers used data from the Health, Work and Retirement Longitudinal Study to explore whether alcohol had any benefits for older New Zealanders' [health](#). The research team, led by Dr Andy Towers from the School of Public Health, found that among more than 2900 older New Zealanders (average age 65), around 45 per cent of men drank daily while less than 25 per cent of women drank daily.

"We initially found that older men and women who consumed one to two drinks daily, and considered moderate drinkers, reported better health than non-drinkers or heavier drinkers. However, we also found that these same [moderate drinkers](#) had higher [socioeconomic status](#) than non-drinkers or heavier drinkers. This makes it hard to conclude whether good health was due to moderate drinking or better socioeconomic status," Dr Towers says.

When the researchers controlled for older New Zealanders' level of socioeconomic status in their analysis, they found that any relationship between moderate drinking and health was significantly reduced for women and completely disappeared for men.

"This is one of the first studies in the world to explore whether [health benefits](#) of drinking exist for [older adults](#). Our results support a growing international body of research showing there is little evidence of any health benefit of alcohol use for younger or older people that cannot be explained by other lifestyle factors," Dr Towers says.

"In fact, our research suggests that older adults' health doesn't reflect 'how much' they are drinking; it reflects 'who is drinking'. Moderate drinkers tend to be wealthier with lifestyles that encourage good health, so it looks like there is a relationship between their drinking and their health status.

"Given that older drinkers are more at risk from alcohol-related harm

than younger drinkers, this is an important finding. If alcohol provides no health benefits for older adults, then how much is too much for an older adult to drink?" Dr Towers says.

The "Health Benefits" of Moderate Drinking in Older Adults may be Better Explained by Socioeconomic Status was written by Dr Towers, Dr Michael Philipp (School of Psychology, Massey University), Dr Patrick Dulin (Department of Psychology, University of Alaska, Anchorage) and Dr Joanne Allen (School of Psychology, Massey University).

More information: Andy Towers et al. The "Health Benefits" of Moderate Drinking in Older Adults may be Better Explained by Socioeconomic Status, *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* (2016). [DOI: 10.1093/geronb/gbw152](https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbw152)

Provided by Massey University

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