

Booze may help or harm the heart, but income matters

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(HealthDay)— Alcohol's effect on heart health, good or ill, may rely in

part on the drinker's income, new research suggests.

For example, the study of more than 200,000 Norwegian adults found that having a few drinks per week was linked to a lowered odds of dying from [heart](#) disease over the 30 years of the study.

But that trend was most pronounced in wealthier people.

On the other hand, [drinking](#) more than that—four to seven drinks per week—was linked to higher rates of heart-linked death, but only for people in the "lowest socioeconomic position," according to a team led by Eirik Degerud, of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health in Oslo.

The findings couldn't prove cause-and-[effect](#). However, the researchers believe that any [health](#) recommendation that centers on alcohol should keep income levels in mind, since the effects of drinking seem to change depending on a person's paycheck.

One type of consumption—regular binge drinking—appeared to be bad news regardless of financial background, however.

Folks who routinely get drunk on a weekly basis saw their odds for fatal heart events rise regardless of their financial status, the study found.

The findings are based on an analysis of health and wealth data concerning nearly 208,000 Norwegian adults. All had been born in 1960 or earlier, and all had participated in three decades worth of compulsory censuses that had been conducted in Norway between 1960 and 1990.

Two cardiologists agreed that drinking's effects on heart may not be a "one size fits all" proposition.

As regards the potential benefits of two to three drinks per week, Dr.

Michael Goyfman said that the rich may appear to benefit more, but the reasons behind that trend remain unclear.

Perhaps it may simply be that the poor are damaged more by even a little drinking, said Goyfman, who directs clinical cardiology at Northwell Health's Long Island Jewish Forest Hills, in Queens, N.Y.

Or wealthier people who have a few drinks per week might also be more apt to engage in healthier eating and exercise, explaining the supposed benefit.

Whatever the reasons, Goyfman believes that the study, "should not be interpreted as an endorsement by researchers to encourage [alcohol consumption](#), since alcohol can have an adverse effect in those with different medical conditions."

Dr. Rachel Bond helps direct Women's Heart Health at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. She agreed that, "in my practice, I advise my patients to drink in moderation. The detrimental effects from other organ systems outweigh any potential cardiac benefit."

"While my patients certainly do not have to abstain from [alcohol](#), I educate them about the risks of [excessive alcohol intake](#)," she added, "both from a cardiovascular standpoint and for their overall health and well-being, regardless of socioeconomic status."

The Norwegian findings were published Jan. 2 in the journal *PLOS Medicine*.

More information: Rachel Bond, M.D., associate director, Women's Heart Health, Lenox Hill Hospital, New York City; Michael Goyfman, M.D., director, clinical cardiology, Northwell Health's Long Island Jewish Forest Hills, Forest Hills, N.Y.; *PLOS Medicine*, Jan. 2, 2018

There's more on drinking and heart health at the [American Heart Association](#).

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