

Even light drinking harms health of older adults: Study

August 13 2024, by Robin Foster



New research confirms that alcohol is not your friend as you age: Even light drinking was linked to an increase in cancer deaths among older adults, with the raised risk most pronounced in those who had other

health problems or lived in low-income areas.

The study, which tracked just over 135,000 adults aged 60 and older for 12 years, also dispels the longstanding belief that light or [moderate alcohol consumption](#) is good for the heart.

Instead, the researchers reported Monday in the journal [JAMA Network Open](#), there was no reduction in heart disease deaths among light or moderate drinkers, regardless of their health or socioeconomic status.

"We did not find evidence of a beneficial association between low drinking and [overall] mortality," lead study author Dr. Rosario Ortolá, an assistant professor of preventive medicine and public health at Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, told the New York Times.

On the other hand, she added, alcohol probably raises the risk of [cancer](#) "from the first drop."

The new findings arrive as experts wrestle with what the official U.S. guidance on alcohol consumption should be. Two scientific groups are preparing reports on the relationship between alcohol and health in advance of an update of the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, the Times reported.

Current [U.S. dietary guidelines](#) say that "drinking less is better for health than drinking more," and that adults aged 21 and older should limit themselves to one drink a day for women and two for men.

Meanwhile, the [World Health Organization](#) says that even low levels of alcohol consumption "can bring [health risks](#)," but adds that "most alcohol-related harms come from heavy episodic or heavy continuous alcohol consumption."

The new study did find that drinking mostly wine and drinking only with

meals moderated the risk, particularly of death from cancer.

That reduction in risk could be due to slower alcohol absorption, or it might reflect other healthy lifestyle choices these people made, Ortolá suggested.

Overall, moderate drinking—defined as between 20 and 40 grams of alcohol daily for men and between 10 and 20 grams for women—was associated with a higher risk of death from all causes and a higher risk of dying of cancer. In the United States, a [standard drink](#) is 14 grams of alcohol.

Heavier drinking—over 40 grams a day for men and over 20 grams a day for women—was associated with higher deaths from all causes, as well as from cancer and [cardiovascular disease](#), the study found.

More information: Rosario Ortolá et al, Alcohol Consumption Patterns and Mortality Among Older Adults With Health-Related or Socioeconomic Risk Factors, *JAMA Network Open* (2024). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.24495](#)

The National Institute on Aging has more on [alcohol and aging](#).

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