

Relation of alcohol consumption to colorectal cancer

13 September 2011

A meta-analysis of case-control and cohort studies on the association of alcohol consumption with colorectal cancer was carried out, based on 22 studies from Asia, 2 from Australia, 13 from Western Europe, and 24 from North America. The paper provides evidence that alcohol, at least at higher levels of consumption, is associated with an increase in the risk of colorectal cancer.

Overall, there was no increase in the risk for consumers reporting an average intake of up to 1 drink per day, but an increase (of 21%) for what the authors defined as "moderate drinking" (averaging up to 49.9 g of alcohol - far in excess of all responsible drinking guidelines). The increase in risk was greater (52%) for consumers of 50 or more grams of alcohol per day.

Forum reviewers thought that this was, in general, a very well-done study that used appropriate statistical techniques for meta-analysis. There were some key concerns, however, including the following: (1) the authors' definition of "moderate drinking" extended well above the usual recommended limits for sensible drinking; effects of consumption in categories of 1 to 2 drinks/day, 2 to 3 drinks/day, etc., were not given; (2) no results were provided according to type of beverage even though many previous studies have shown differences between health effects for [consumers](#) of wine, or wine/beer, and other beverages; and (3) no data were available on the pattern of drinking. Many studies have shown that regular, [moderate drinking](#) on most days of the week has very different health outcomes than drinking only on week-ends or binge drinking.

Despite these concerns, Forum members agreed that current data indicate that alcohol intake, especially heavier drinking, is associated with an increase in the risk of colorectal cancers. Future studies are needed to help determine if there is a threshold level of alcohol that increases the risk, if there are differences by type of beverage, and if

the pattern of drinking (regular versus binge drinking) affects the risk.

More information: Fedirko V, Tramacere I, Bagnardi V, Rota M, Scotti L, Islami F, et al. Alcohol drinking and colorectal cancer risk: an overall and dose - response meta-analysis of published studies. *Annals of Oncology* 22: 1958, 2011, [doi:10.1093/annonc/mdq653](https://doi.org/10.1093/annonc/mdq653)

For the detailed critique of this paper by the International Scientific Forum on Alcohol Research click here: www.bu.edu/alcohol-forum/critique-13-september-2011/

Provided by Boston University Medical Center

APA citation: Relation of alcohol consumption to colorectal cancer (2011, September 13) retrieved 25 November 2020 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-09-alcohol-consumption-colorectal-cancer.html>

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