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http://www2.potsdam.edu/hansondj/AlcoholAndHealth.html

Alcohol And Health

Moderate drinkers tend to have better health and live longer than those who are either abstainers or heavy drinkers. In addition to having fewer heart attacks and strokes, moderate consumers of alcoholic beverages (beer, wine or distilled spirits or liquor) are generally less likely to suffer hypertension or high blood pressure, peripheral artery disease, Alzheimer's disease and the common cold. Sensible drinking also appears to be beneficial in reducing or preventing diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, bone fractures and osteoporosis, kidney stones, digestive ailments, stress and depression, poor cognition and memory, Parkinson's disease, hepatitis A, pancreatic cancer, macular degeneration (a major cause of blindness), angina pectoris, duodenal ulcer, erectile sysfunction, hearing loss, gallstones, liver disease and poor physical condition in elderly.

Some History

Alcohol has been used medicinally throughout recorded history; its medicinal properties are mentioned 191 times in the Old and New Testaments. 1 As early as the turn of the century there was evidence that moderate consumption of alcohol was associated with a decrease in the risk of heart attack. 2 And the evidence of health benefits of moderate consumption has continued to grow over time. A review of research evidence from 1900 to 1986 found a strong, consistent relationship

between moderate alcohol consumption and reduction in cardiovascular disease in general and coronary artery disease in particular. 3 This is important because cardiovascular disease is the number one cause of death in the United States, and heart disease kills about one million Americans each and every year. 4

To your health

The health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption have long been known. One of the earliest scientific studies on the subject was published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1904. 65

The Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism recently wrote that "Numerous well-designed studies have concluded that moderate drinking is associated with improved cardiovascular health," and the Nutrition Committee of the American Heart Association recently reported that "The lowest mortality occurs in those who consume one or two drinks per day." 5 Several years ago a World Health Organization Technical Committee on Cardiovascular Disease asserted that the relationship between moderate alcohol consumption and reduced death from heart disease could no longer be doubted. 6 But the benefits are not limited, important as they are, to reductions in heart disease.

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Longevity

Moderate drinkers tend to live longer than those who either abstain or drink heavily.

- A recent Harvard study found the risk of death from all causes to be 21% to 28% lower among men who drank alcohol moderately, compared to abstainers. [7]
- A large-scale study in China recently found that middle-aged men who drank moderately had a nearly 20% lower overall mortality compared to abstainers. [8]
- Harvard's Nurses' Health Study of over 85,000 women found reduced mortality among moderate drinkers. [9]
- A British analysis of 12,000 male physicians found that moderate drinkers had the lowest risk of death from all causes during the 13 year study. [10]
- A large study of about 88,000 people conducted over a period of ten years found that moderate drinkers were about 27% less likely to die during the period than were either abstainers or heavy drinkers. The superior longevity was largely due to a reduction of such diseases as coronary heart disease, cancer, and respiratory diseases. [11]
- A large study funded by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism found that moderate drinking increased the length of life by about 3% among white males. [12]
- A twelve year long prospective study of over 200,000 men found that subjects who had consumed alcohol in moderation were less likely to die than those who abstained from alcohol. [13]

Alcohol vs. Lifestyle

Why drink to reduce the risk of heart disease? Wouldn't eating a good diet, exercising, and losing weight do the same thing?

No, it wouldn't. The moderate consumption of alcohol appears to be more effective than most other lifestyle changes that are used to lower the risk of heart and other diseases. For example, the average person would need to follow a very strict low-fat diet, exercise vigorously on a regular basis, eliminate salt from the diet, lose a substantial amount of weight, and probably begin medication in order to lower cholesterol by 30 points or blood pressure by 20 points.

But medical research suggests that alcohol can have a greater impact on heart disease than even these hard-won reductions in cholesterol levels or blood pressure. Only cessation of smoking is more effective.

Additionally, other medical research suggests that adding alcohol to a healthful diet is more effective than just following the diet alone. [60]

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Healthier Lives

Moderate drinkers tend to enjoy better health than do either abstainers or healthy drinkers.

- A nation-wide survey in the U.S. revealed that daily moderate drinkers experienced significantly less acute hospitalization. [14]
- A nine year study of predictors of good health found moderate alcohol consumption to be associated with the most favorable health scores. [15]
- A nation-wide Canadian study found moderate drinkers who consumed alcohol daily to have 15% less disability than the general population. [16]
- A Dutch study found that moderate drinkers under stress were less likely to be absent from work than were either abstainers or heavy drinkers. [17]

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vs. Heart Attacks

Moderate drinkers are also less likely to suffer heart attacks than are abstainers or heavy drinkers.

- Harvard researchers have identified the moderate consumption of alcohol as a proven way to reduce coronary heart disease risk. 18
- An exhaustive review of all major heart disease studies found that "Alcohol consumption is related to total mortality in a U-shaped manner, where moderate consumers have a reduced total mortality compared with total non-consumers and heavy consumers." 19
- A National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism study asserts that "The totality of evidence on moderate alcohol and CHD (coronary heart disease) supports a judgment of a cause-effect relationship....there are cardioprotective benefits associated with responsible, moderate alcohol intake." 20

U-shaped Curve

- The Harvard Health Professionals Follow-Up Study of over 44,000 males found moderate alcohol consumption to be associated with a 37% reduction in coronary disease. 21
- A British study of women found moderate consumption of alcohol to be associated with lower levels of cardiovascular risk factors. 22
- The Honolulu Heart Study found a 49% reduction in coronary heart disease among men who drink alcohol in moderation. 23
- Harvard researchers concluded about coronary heart disease that "Consumption of one or two drinks of beer, wine, or liquor per day has corresponded to a reduction in risk of approximately 20-40%." 24
- At a recent conference, researchers from Korea, Italy, Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, and the United States reported striking reductions in death among moderate drinkers, with heart disease and total mortality rates about one half or less compared to non-drinkers. 25
- After reviewing the research, Dr. David Whitten reported that "The studies that have been done show pretty clearly that the chances of suffering cardiac death are dramatically reduced by drinking" one or two drinks a day and asserted that "We don't have any drugs that are as good as alcohol." 26
- Based on the medical evidence, noted investigator Dr. Curtis Ellison asserted that "abstinence from alcohol is a major risk factor for coronary heart disease." 27

How does alcohol reduce heart disease? It appears that moderate consumption of alcohol improves health and longevity in a number of ways, including the following:

- Alcohol improves blood lipid profile 28
  - It increases HDL ("good") cholesterol 29

What About...

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome?

To learn about this preventable health problem visit Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

- It decreases LDL ("bad") cholesterol [30]

- Alcohol decreases thrombosis (blood clotting)
  - It reduces platelet aggregation [31]
  - It reduces fibrinogen (a blood clotter) [31.1]
  - It increases fibrinolysis (the process by which clots dissolve) [32]
- Alcohol acts through additional ways [33]
  - It reduces coronary artery spasm in response to stress
  - it increases coronary blood flow [34]
  - It reduces blood pressure [35]
  - It reduces blood insulin level [35.1]
  - It increases estrogen levels

What About...

Gaining Weight?

Drinking puts on pounds, right? Wrong! To learn more, visit Alcohol, Calories and Weight.

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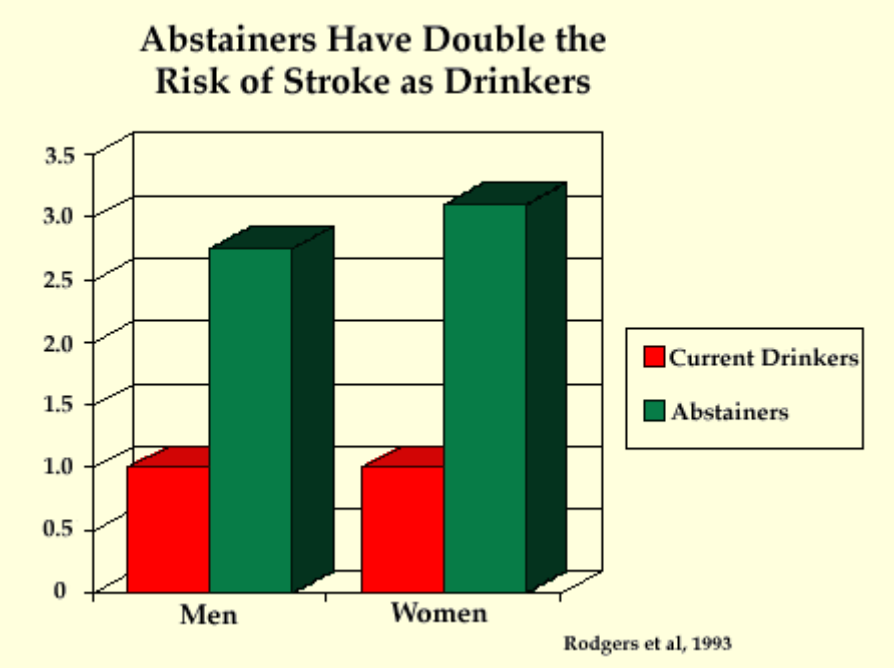
Other Benefits

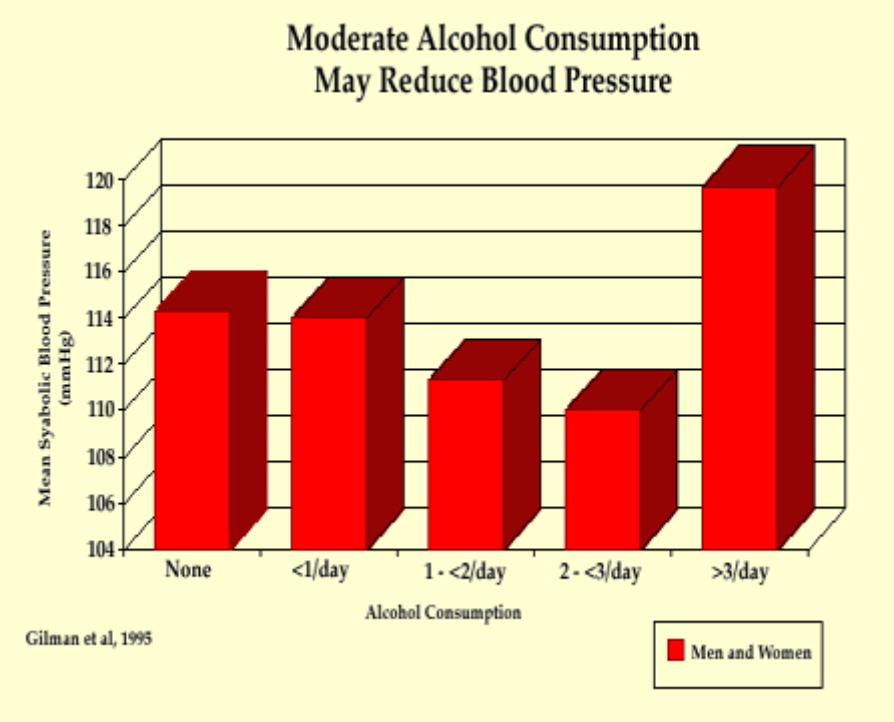
The moderate consumption of alcohol is also apparently effective in reducing the incidence of a broad range of diseases and other health problems.

A recent study published in the American Heart Association's journal found abstainers' risk of stroke to be double that of moderate drinkers. [36]



The American Heart Association has also reported moderate consumption of alcohol to be associated with dramatically decreased risk of stroke among both men and women, regardless of age or ethnicity. [37]

A recent Harvard University study found the lowest levels of hypertension among young adults who consumed one to three drinks per day. [38]



Harvard researchers recently found moderate drinkers to be almost 1/3 less likely to suffer Peripheral Artery Disease (a significant cause of death among the elderly) than those consuming less than one drink per week. 39

A recent French study found moderate drinkers to have a 75% lower risk for Alzheimer's Disease and an 80% lower risk for senile dementia. 40 Many other studies have also documented the lower risk of Alzheimer's disease as well as better cognitive or thinking ability among moderate drinkers compared to abstainers. 40.1

Moderate drinkers have been found to be more resistant than abstainers to five strains of the common cold virus. Those who consumed 2 to 3 drinks daily had an 85% greater resistance. Those drinking 1 to 2 drinks daily had a 65% lower risk and those who drank less than daily had a 30% lower risk than abstainers. 41

And the list goes on...

Moderate consumption of alcohol appears to be beneficial to reducing or preventing even more diseases and health problems:

Angina Pectoris 42

Bone Fractures and Osteoporosis 43

Diabetes 44

Digestive Ailments 45

Duodenal Ulcer 46

Erectile Dysfunction 47

Essential Tremors 47.1

Gallstones 48

Hearing Loss 48.1

Hepatitis A 49

Kidney Stones 50

Liver Disease 51

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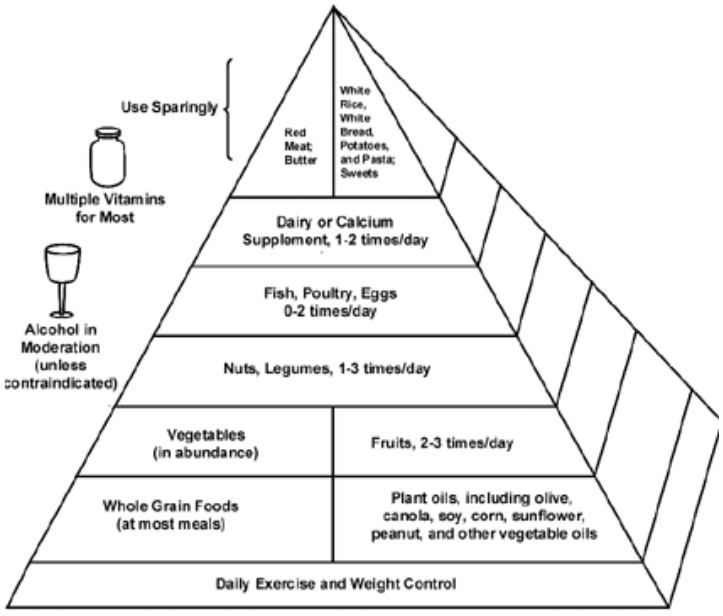
What Is Moderation?

Medical researchers generally describe moderation as one to three drinks per day. It appears that consuming less than about half a drink per day is associated with only very small health benefits. Four or five drinks may be moderate for large individuals but excessive for small or light people. Because of their generally smaller size and other biological differences, the typical woman should generally consume 25 to 30 percent less than the average man. 61 And, of course, recovering alcoholics, those with any adverse reactions to alcohol, and those advised against drinking by their physicians should abstain.

A drink is a 12 ounce can or bottle of beer, a five ounce glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor (either straight or in a mixed drink). 62 [learn about Alcohol Equivalence and visit Standard Drinks]

Harvard's Healthy Eating Pyramid, produced by the Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating, was co-developed by scientists at the Harvard School of Public Health. It is based on the best available scientific knowledge and recommends drinking alcohol in moderation (unless there is a good reason to abstain). 63

Drinking patterns appear to be as important as the amounts consumed. "The key to healthy, moderate consumption is a regular, one to three drinks per day pattern." 64 However, drinking a "weeks worth" of alcohol over a period of a few hours would be unhealthful, even dangerous, and clearly to be avoided.



All of the many health benefits of drinking apply only to moderate consumption - - never to heavy drinking. To the contrary, heavy drinking is associated with reduced longevity and increased risk of a diversity of diseases. Unfortunately, there really can be too much of a good thing.

Salud, skoal, a votre sante', prost, l'chayim, or, in English, "to your health," but all in moderation!

The material on this site is for information only and is not advice

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62. The American Dietetic Association points out that the facts of alcohol beverage equivalence "are emphasized by the federal government and numerous public health organizations including Nation Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, Departments of Transportation and Health and Human Services, National Consumers League, National Council of Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)" (American Dietetic Association, *Nutrition Fact Sheet: Moderate Consumption of Distilled Spirits and Other Beverage Alcohol in an Adult Diet*. Chicago, Illinois: American Dietetic Association, 2001, p.1). Alcohol beverage equivalence applies to standard drink sizes. Of course, five ounces of a desert wine contains more alcohol, as does a higher alcohol content beer or ale, or a distilled spirit higher than the typical 80 proof. The equivalent sizes for these drinks would differ from those of a standard drink, a fact that drinkers should keep in mind. (Carol, C. R. *Drugs in Modern Society*. Boston, Massachusetts: McGraw-Hill, 2000, p. 77.)

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