



## A Little Alcohol Won't Kill You or Make You Stronger -- WSJ

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First, the good news: A nip of alcohol here and there probably won't kill you. But it won't help you live longer either.

For a study published Friday in the journal JAMA Network Open, researchers set out to make sense of years of conflicting evidence on alcohol's effect on health. Some research suggested that drinking alcohol improves life expectancy. Other studies had demonstrated poorer health outcomes at any level of drinking.

The researchers analyzed 107 studies on the effect of alcohol in nearly five million people and found that no amount of alcohol consumption led to longer life than among people who never drank. People who drank 45 grams of alcohol or more a day -- about as much as in three glasses of wine -- increased their risk of dying sooner by up to a third. Among women, anything more than 25 grams of alcohol increased their risk of dying sooner.

"Alcohol is linked to more than 200 diseases. You would be bored by the time I finished naming them all," said Dr. Jürgen Rehm, senior scientist at Canada's Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, who wasn't involved in the study.

The new study joins a body of evidence that alcohol does more harm than good.

Health officials in Canada this year recommended that people have two drinks or fewer a week to lower health risks. That replaced guidance that 10 drinks a week was a low health risk.

Rates of deaths involving alcohol in the U.S. rose a record 25% during the pandemic in 2020 and an additional 10% in 2021, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism ([javascript:void\(0\);](#)). Per capita alcohol consumption, measured as gallons of pure alcohol per person, rose 2.9% in 2020, the largest increase in more than 50 years.

Tim Stockwell, director of the Canada Institute for Substance Use Research and an author of the new study, said many studies demonstrating health benefits from alcohol consumption were poorly conducted. For their review, he and his colleagues adjust for recurring flaws in much of that research.

Many studies counted people who had stopped drinking after years of heavy consumption with people who had never had a sip of alcohol. Comparing people who had stopped drinking because of health concerns with moderate drinkers made moderate drinkers look healthier. Dr. Stockwell called it the "sick quitter effect."

Some studies didn't account for occasional drinkers who have outgrown the party life, another factor that would make heavier drinkers -- who tend to be younger and have less chronic health problems -- look healthier.

Other studies only followed people's drinking patterns for a few days and extrapolated the findings to their health outcomes 30 years in the future. "We can't remove the effect of all those bad studies in a meta analysis," he said. "But we can bat it down a bit."

The findings suggest that the average man can drink up to about three drinks a day and expect to live as long as nondrinkers. Women might want to stop at about two drinks, the research suggested.

Kevin Shield, a scientist who works with the World Health Organization ([javascript:void\(0\);](#)) in Toronto to track the effect of alcohol consumption around the world, said that while less appears to be best, scientists are identifying genes that can affect a person's susceptibility to the ill effects of alcohol.

Genes that contribute to an inability to metabolize alcohol are also related to lower cardiovascular risk, he said. Some people with genes that are associated with flushing red when they drink are at higher risk of some cancers, he said. People with higher tolerance are also at higher risk for alcohol dependence and cardiovascular disease, genetics research shows.

"We are discovering tons of new genes that track with alcohol," he said.

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