

## The Benefits of Moderate Drinking

The French consume large amounts of wine and high cholesterol foods, yet they have a low rate of heart disease. The Japanese drink large amounts of saki, but eat basically low cholesterol foods and have a low incidence of heart disease.

Originally it was thought that only wine provided a protective effect and for the most part, the beneficial effects of alcohol were only suggested for men. Recent reviews and studies are showing that moderate consumption of other alcoholic beverages is equally protective and that women can also benefit.

As in most things in life, moderation appears to be the key. Over the past decade researchers have reported that moderate alcohol consumption helps to reduce, or even prevent, heart attack and the development of coronary artery disease (CAD). Moderate consumption is usually defined as no more than two drinks a day for men and one for women.

Further research has shown that moderate use of alcohol also reduces the risk of sudden death and stroke. This effect may be due to increases in high-density lipoproteins (HDLs), the "good" cholesterol. Alcohol affects several markers for coronary risk factors, including blood pressure, HDL cholesterol, low-density-lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol and clotting factors.

While there do appear to be health benefits to moderate drinking, this does not mean everyone should drink alcohol. Scientists are still weighing the benefits of alcohol consumption against the risks of addiction, accidents, high blood pressure, liver disease and cancer.

Studies have shown that coronary heart diseases are less prevalent in populations consuming moderate amounts of alcohol on a regular basis. In three prospective studies conducted in Denmark it was found that wine drinkers were at a lower risk of alcohol-induced cirrhosis than beer and spirit drinkers.

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