

Moderate drinking may help older women live longer

13 December 2006

A study published in Journal of the American Geriatrics Society finds that moderate alcohol intake (1-2 drinks/day for 3-6 days/week, depending on alcoholic content) may lead to increased quality of life and survival in older women. The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health followed nearly 12,000 women in their 70's over a 6 year period. The group was comprised of non-drinkers, occasional drinkers and moderate drinkers.

The study found that non-drinkers and women who rarely drank had a significantly higher risk of dying during the survey period than did women who drank moderately. Of those who survived, the women who drank the least reported the lowest health-related quality of life. Previous studies have shown that women who have at least one drink per day stand at a lower risk for cardiovascular disease and ischemic stroke than non-drinkers.

"The results of this study indicate that moderate alcohol intake in keeping with current guidelines may carry some health benefits for older women," says Dr. Julie Ellen Byles, author of the study. This contrasts previous studies which have suggested that moderate alcohol intake can be detrimental to older women and may lead to accidents, cancers, even dementia.

The potential causes of increased health and survival may be ingredients found in wine or ethanol, the social and pleasurable benefits of drinking or the improved appetite and nutrition that often accompanies modest alcohol intake. The author notes that the study does not advocate non-drinkers to begin drinking. Changes in diet need to be determined through consultation with a doctor due to the potential complications of mixing alcohol and medication.

Source: Blackwell Publishing

APA citation: Moderate drinking may help older women live longer (2006, December 13) retrieved 11 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-12-moderate-older-women-longer.html>

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