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Major study confirms moderate drinking helps you live longer

LONDON (Reuter) – British doctors released results today of one of the longest studies into the effects of alcohol on health, and concluded people who have on average one or two drinks a day live longer than those who do not drink at all.

But more is not better – those who have three to four drinks a day or more are likely to die sooner than light drinkers.

The report, published in the *British Medical Journal*, confirms various studies that have found light drinking – defined as 21 units a week for men and 14 units for women – has a beneficial effect.

Dozens of studies have been published in recent years linking moderate alcohol consumption with better health. The most famous ones show that the French, despite high fat intake and a relatively inactive lifestyle, die of heart disease less often than other Westerners.

This has been linked to special qualities in red wine, of which the French are inordinately fond.

"I don't think the mechanisms are known," said Sir Richard Doll, author of the study. "There is no evidence for this apparent French paradox."

The French paradox was debunked in a 21-nation World Health Organization study last month that showed many more French people died from heart disease than official statistics seemed to show.

But Doll said his group's findings seemed to apply to any sort of alcohol. "We don't find any measurable difference between one type of drink or another," he said.

An American Medical Association study last month found that if the entire U.S. population stopped drinking alcohol, there would be an additional 81,000 deaths from heart disease every year.

That study, written by Paul Ridker of the Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School in Boston, found that moderate alcohol consumption increased the levels of a key enzyme in the bloodstream that unclogs blood clots.

REFERENCES: Doll, R., Peto, R., Hall, E., Wheatley, K. and R. Gray: Mortality in relation to consumption of alcohol: 13 years' observations on British male doctors. *British Med. J.* **309**(#6959): 911-918 (1994). [DC Library call number: PER R31.B93]

Ridker, P.M., Vaughan, D.E., Stampfer, M.J., Glynn, R.J. and C.H. Hennekens: Association of moderate alcohol consumption and plasma concentration of endogenous tissue-type plasminogen activator. *JAMA* **273**(#12): 929-933 (1994); see also the editorial on pages 967-968: Pearson, T.A. and P. Terry: What to advise patients about drinking alcohol: The clinician's conundrum. [DC Library call number: PER R15.A48]

The article EM9416 reprinted above is used in Chapter 11 of the STAT 231 Course Materials and is one of ten 1994 articles used in Figure 2.19b of the STAT 332 Course Materials.

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