

Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



April, 2010

To Drink or Not to Drink - Risks and Benefits of Alcohol Intake

When it comes to your health, is it better to drink or not to drink?

It's becoming an even more complicated question, especially in the wake of several recent studies linking even a little drinking of alcohol to a higher risk of cancers.

In one of them, researchers found that women who had as little as one drink a day boosted their risk of cancer of the breast, liver, rectum, throat, mouth, and esophagus. Meanwhile, numerous studies dating back decades show that alcohol and heart health have a positive relationship.

So what's a health-conscious person to do? How can our awareness of its risks and benefits be enhanced? While the experts disagree on some answers, they do agree that no one who has or had a problem with alcohol dependency should drink, nor should any woman who is pregnant. Experts in cardiology, oncology, epidemiology, and internal medicine who are familiar with the latest research clarify the risks and benefits of alcohol intake. Here is what they had to say about alcohol and health:



From a Health Point of View, What is The Best Advice You Would Give About Drinking Alcohol?

There's no one answer, it's crucial to take into account age, sex, specific medical problems, and family history. The research on alcohol's effect on health suggests both harm and benefits. The studies show links to breast cancer and links to liver cancer however, there seems to be a benefit with alcohol and heart disease.

Are There Any Other Established Links Between Alcohol and Health?

Yes, heavy drinking and cirrhosis of the liver are linked. Excess

alcohol can also cause what experts call cirrhosis of the heart, a type of heart muscle damage. Too much alcohol can trigger high blood pressure and lead to strokes and heart rhythm disturbances. Drinking regularly may contribute to a weight problem or cause one. Alcohol is an appetite stimulant, you tend to eat more. On the plus



(Over)

To Drink or Not to Drink . . . (Continued)

side, drinking alcohol moderately seems to protect against dementia, and type 2 diabetes.

Are There Relaxation Benefits of Drinking Alcohol?

Yes, in low or moderate amounts, alcohol causes euphoria [and] reduction of stress. Stress reduction is good for the heart, but it's not a reason to take up drinking if you're a nondrinker.

Does The Type of Alcohol Matter?

Some studies show some types of alcoholic beverages may have healthier effects than others. For instance, a recent study showed that people who drank one glass of wine a day (but not beer or liquor) had a 56% reduced risk of getting Barrett's esophagus, a condition that boosts the risk of esophageal cancer, compared to nondrinkers.

Some experts also say red wine may be better for the heart than white due to antioxidants such as resveratrol found in greater amounts in red wine. Other recent research hasn't shown differences, for instance, in red or white wine and the effect on breast cancer risk.

In the big picture, the pattern of drinking matters more than the type of beverage.

Is There a Truly Safe Level of Drinking Alcohol?

Not a universally safe level, experts say a safe level for one person may not be for another.

Nothing is absolutely safe for everybody however, there is a sensible level of drinking. And sensible doesn't mean saving up, put it in the bank, whatever

Benefits Corner

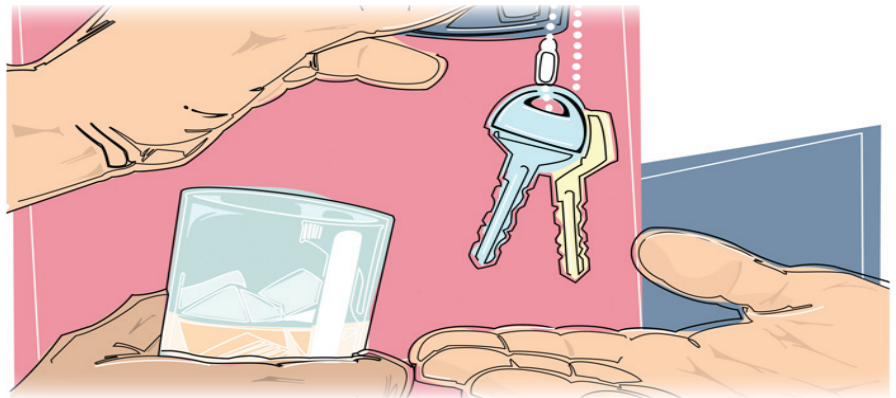
The County Health Pool does provide coverage for Alcohol/Substance Abuse for both inpatient and outpatient procedures. To find out more information on this benefit, please go to www.ctsi.org and view the CHP Plan Document.

TOLL FREE NUMBER

The County Health Pool now has a new toll free number that is effective immediately. The number is 1-877-328-2671. You may still use the 303-861-0507 number with the direct extension for your Benefit Administrator.

As a reminder....

If you have a change of address, please fill out a new application and give it to your entity contact to send it directly to CHP, so that we may update our records so that you will not miss receiving your ID cards, EOB's etc.



number of drinks is deemed reasonable per week and drinking them all at once in one sitting. That's binge drinking, and considered unhealthy.

Is it better, then, to drink only a little every day or moderately just a few times a week?

Experts don't agree entirely.

Some will say not drink more than two or three times a week. Others will suggest a glass of wine or other alcohol maybe twice a week.

Still others will say a healthier pattern for many people is to have a small amount nearly every day.

Moderate levels must be tailored to the individual. (*Moderate drinking, is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as no more than one drink a day for women and no more than two drinks a day for men. A drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits.*)

Alcohol abuse is a serious problem, nationally, April is designated "Alcohol Awareness Month." For additional information about the hazards of drinking alcohol and its safe consumption, review the sources below.

Sources: WebMD.com and SAMHSA.gov.