

More evidence that alcohol may not be as healthy for you as once thought.

Even a little alcohol ups cancer risk in women

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A look at data for over 1 million women in the UK indicates that drinking alcohol -- even low amounts -- increases the risk of certain cancers in women.

According to the data released today, about 13 percent of the cancers of the breast, liver, rectum, and upper respiratory/gastrointestinal system may be related to alcohol use.

In their analysis of 1,280,296 middle-aged women from the so-called Million Women Study, Dr. Naomi E. Allen and colleagues from the University of Oxford found that 24 percent of participants reported no alcohol consumption. Women in the study who did drink alcohol consumed, on average, one drink per day. Very few drank three or more drinks per day.

During an average follow-up time of more than 7 years, 68,775 women were diagnosed with cancer.

As daily alcohol intake increased, so did the risks for cancers of the mouth and throat, esophagus, larynx (voicebox), rectum, liver, and breast, the researchers found. The risks were similar for women who drank wine exclusively or other beverages.

By contrast, alcohol intake was associated with decreased risks of certain cancers, including thyroid cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, and renal cell carcinoma (the main type of kidney cancer).

The investigators calculate that for each additional alcohol drink consumed regularly per day the excess number of cases per 1000 women up to age 75 was 11 for breast cancer, 1 for mouth and throat cancer, 1 for rectal cancer, and 0.7 each for malignancies of the esophagus, larynx, and liver.

The findings appear in the March 4th issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute.

In a related commentary, Dr. Michael S. Lauer and Dr. Paul Sorlie, from the National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, wrote: "Despite its attractions, alcohol has been the proximate cause of a great deal of human misery, now with additional documentation by the elegant report of Allen et. al."

"Perhaps the complex story of alcohol," they add, "can be best summed up by what the great professor Albus Dumbledore said about truth in one of his conversations with his student Harry Potter: 'It is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution'."

SOURCE: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, March 4, 2009.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/24/AR2009022402361.html>

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