



Q&A Alcohol & the Heart

Q: I thought alcohol was good for the heart

The supposed benefits of alcohol for the heart have been widely promoted. At first glance, it appears alcohol does have benefit for heart health. However, dig deeper into the evidence and it becomes much less clear.

Studies have shown a 'J-shaped' relationship between alcohol intake and heart disease risk. That means low to moderate drinking looks better for the heart than either no drinking or heavy drinking. But there are strong reasons to think the association is due to factors other than alcohol. For example, people who drink alcohol moderately tend to be healthier in a lot of other ways. There are also methodological concerns with the data.

While it is plausible there is an effect from alcohol, there are too many doubts to recommend alcohol for heart health. Even if it became evident there was benefit:

- The overall benefit would be small, and many people would get no or little benefit
- There would be increased risk of cancer and liver disease (at any level of alcohol intake)
- The risks from excess alcohol consumption are high.

Q: I drink quite a lot, but only at the weekend

Heavy or binge drinking is the most harmful form of drinking for the heart and increases risk even in people who don't usually drink heavily.

Q: Should I stop drinking?

Whether you choose to drink or not is your decision. But we do not advise drinking to improve your heart health. A low average consumption of alcohol without any heavy drinking episodes, or no alcohol consumption, is the best option for heart health.

Q: If I choose to drink, how much is okay?

If you choose to drink, we recommend following ALAC's safe drinking guidelines. These are no more than:

- 2 standard drinks a day for women and no more than 10 standard drinks a week
- 3 standard drinks a day for men and no more than 15 standard drinks a week
- At least two days each week that are alcohol free

A standard drink is 100ml wine or 330ml beer.