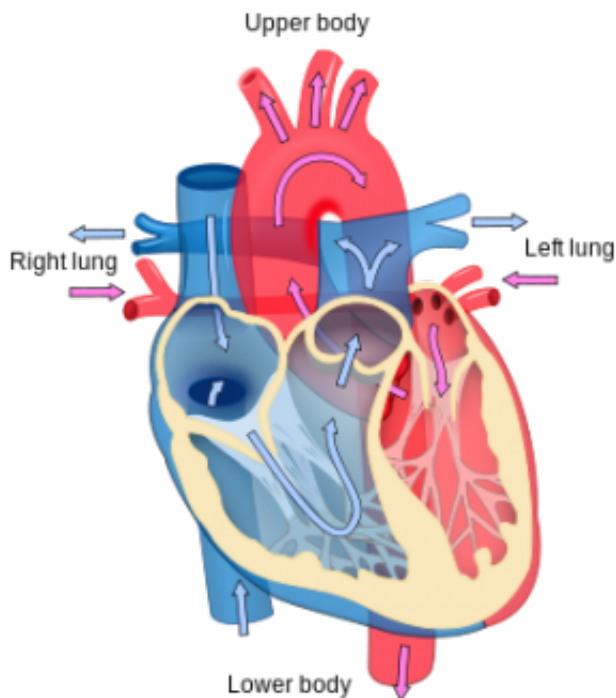


Moderate drinking in later years may damage heart

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Heart diagram. Credit: Wikipedia

Drinking two or more alcoholic beverages daily may damage the heart of elderly people, according to research in the American Heart Association journal *Circulation: Cardiovascular Imaging*. The study correlated weekly alcohol consumption among 4,466 people—average age 76—to the size, structure and motion of various parts of the heart.

Researchers found:

- The more people drank, the greater the subtle changes to the [heart](#)'s structure and function.
- Among men, drinking more than 14 [alcoholic beverages](#) weekly (heavy drinking) was linked with enlargement of the wall of the heart's main pumping chamber (left ventricular mass).
- Among women, [moderate drinkers](#) had small reductions in heart function.

"Women appear more susceptible than men to the cardiotoxic effects of alcohol, which might potentially contribute to a higher risk of alcoholic cardiomyopathy, for any given level of [alcohol intake](#)," said Scott Solomon, M.D., senior author of the study and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and director of noninvasive cardiology at Brigham and Women's in Boston.

Previous research has shown that light to moderate drinking may protect against some cardiovascular disease, while heavy drinking has been linked with a higher risk for cardiomyopathy—in which the heart muscle becomes larger, thicker, more rigid, or is replaced by scar tissue.

"In spite of potential benefits of low alcohol intake, our findings highlight the possible hazards to cardiac structure and function by increased amounts of [alcohol consumption](#) in the elderly, particularly among women. This reinforces the U.S. recommendations stating that those who drink should do so with moderation," said Alexandra Gonçalves, M.D.; Ph.D., lead author of the study and Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Brigham and Women's in Boston.

Moderate drinking is generally defined as two drinks a day (beer, wine or liquor) for men and one drink a day for women. The American Heart Association guidelines and 2010 U.S. Dietary Guidelines recommend

limiting alcohol intake to up to one drink a day for women and up to two for men.

Provided by American Heart Association

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