

Risks of cancer and mortality by average lifetime alcohol intake

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The risk of mortality, and of developing a number of cancers, is lowest in light drinkers consuming an average of less than one drink per day across their lifetime, and the risk of some cancers increases with each additional drink per week. Credit: Pixabay, CC0

The risk of mortality, and of developing a number of cancers, is lowest in light drinkers consuming an average of less than one drink per day across their lifetime, and the risk of some cancers increases with each additional drink per week, according to a new study, published this week in *PLOS Medicine* by Andrew Kunzmann of Queen's University Belfast, and colleagues.

In comparison, current U.S. guidelines recommend no more than 2 drinks per day for men and no more than 1 drink per day for women.

Even light-to-moderate levels of [alcohol](#) intake have previously been linked to increased [cancer](#) risk. At the same time, research has demonstrated a "J-shaped" risk curve relating [alcohol intake](#) to all-cause mortality, suggesting some protective effect of light-to-moderate drinking, particularly for death from cardiovascular disease. Those results have led to mixed public health messages. The new study analyzed whether combined risk of cancer or [death](#) from any cause differed in individuals with different alcohol intakes across their entire [lifetime](#), using data from 99,654 individuals around the US who were followed for an average of 8.9 years as participants in the Prostate, Lung, Colorectal, and Ovarian Cancer Screening Trial. Alcohol use was measured using a diet history questionnaire administered between 1998 and 2000.

During the study, 9,559 deaths and 12,763 primary cancers occurred among the participants. The expected J-shaped relationship between overall mortality and alcohol consumption was seen: in comparison to lifetime light alcohol drinkers (1-3 drinks per week), lifetime never or infrequent drinkers (

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