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Moderate Wine Consumption Linked to Lower Risk of Dementia, Study Finds

By [Jacob Gaffney](#)

Drinking one to two glasses of wine per day may help prevent the development of dementia, more so than any other form of alcohol, according to a team of researchers based in Copenhagen, Denmark. Their findings hint that chemical compounds found in wine, but not in beer or spirits, may be responsible for this beneficial effect.

“It could very well be that it is not the alcohol but other substances that are responsible for any such effects,” said lead author Thomas Truelson, of the Institute of Preventative Medicine in Copenhagen. The authors theorized in their study that the antioxidant effects of flavonoids — phenolic compounds found abundantly in grapes, nuts and tea leaves — could explain the relationship between wine and reduced risk of dementia.

The “Amount and Type of Alcohol and Risk of Dementia” study, published in the November issue of the journal *Neurology*, examined the risk of developing dementia among nondrinkers and drinkers who prefer wine, beer or spirits.

Its results lend some support to other recent research findings, [including two studies](#) published about a year ago. Both studies, one from the Netherlands and one from Italy, suggested that moderate alcohol consumption may provide protection from age-related brain ailments, such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. However, one looked primarily at wine drinking, while the other found no difference in effect among the types of alcohol.

Truelson explained, “We have [examined] the effect of beer, wine and spirits independently of each other. Thus, it is the effect of the intake of either type of alcohol independently of the two others that we have estimated.”

For the study, Truelson and his team examined 1,709 people picked from the large Copenhagen City Heart Study. Participants in that study had their drinking patterns assessed in the 1970s and went through a gamut of tests, from blood pressure to mental exams. They also answered questions about their income, education, marital status and lifestyle habits, such as smoking.

Truelson and the researchers tracked down nearly 10 percent of the heart-study participants, and between 1991 and 1994, when the subjects were older than 65, tested them for dementia according to the American Psychiatric Association’s standards. While dementia manifests itself in several forms, all types lead to memory loss and impairment of cognitive functions.

The participants were given follow-up questionnaires on their drinking habits, including frequency and preference. They were then classified as beer, wine or spirits drinkers or nondrinkers.

Those who did drink were further divided according to how many drinks they consumed in an average week: less than one, one to seven, eight to 14, 15 to 21, or more than 22. One drink was

defined as containing between 9 to 13 grams of alcohol, or as a standard bottle of beer, glass of wine or shot of liquor.

The group that showed the fewest signs of dementia were those who drank wine moderately, or eight to 14 drinks per week. Second were those who hardly ever or never drink, followed closely by spirits drinkers. Beer drinkers showed the highest possibility of developing dementia, with a risk almost twice that of nondrinkers and four times more than wine drinkers. (Truelson noted, “We are very skeptical about the beer results,” as analysis of weekly versus monthly intake does not show a clear trend.)

Excessive drinking, defined as more than 22 glasses per week, increased the risk regardless of the preferred beverage.

Truelson cautioned against changing drinking habits based on his study or other recent research. “I would not recommend wine as part of [one’s] diet based on this data,” he said. “Our knowledge about what it is in wine that might decrease the risk of dementia is insufficient.”

But the study garnered some praise in the medical community. In an editorial in the same issue of *Neurology*, John Brust, from the department of neurology at the Harlem Hospital Center in New York, wrote, “This is a provocative report providing evidence that there is indeed something specifically beneficial about wine.”