

## Doctors Should Start Recommending Alcohol Consumption, Argue Australian Researchers

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By Jacob Gaffney

A team of medical researchers in Australia is arguing that doctors should start recommending the moderate consumption of alcohol to some of their patients, according to an article published in the August issue of *Australian Family Physician*.

After analyzing some of the copious amounts of research conducted on drinking and health over the past 10 years, Dr. John Dixon, a senior researcher at Monash University, near Melbourne, believes the old toast "to your health" may ring with some truth. He thinks the news should be spread by physicians, despite the possibility of attracting the ire of doctors in areas of the world where modern medical treatment is available and alcohol drinking is discouraged.

"I do not think I am going out on a limb [with this article]," said Dixon. "The data from large epidemiological studies is very clear and consistent, and [our] recommendations in the article are very conservative."

Dixon and his team examined 33 studies regarding moderate drinking and potentially deadly diseases and concluded that doctors in areas that discourage drinking, perhaps for religious or cultural reasons, may actually be harming their patients' health by not recommending alcohol consumption.

The United States is among the places that Dixon considers conservative in terms of the medical community's attitude toward alcohol. "I spend some time in the U.S. every year and read their material [and] the difference between [our] countries is noticeable," Dixon said. "...Australia is far more like parts of Europe. We are far more likely to have a glass of wine with our evening meal than a glass of Pepsi. I have no doubt which one is best for your health."

Moderate drinking was defined as at least one drink per week and up to two drinks a day for women and up to four a day for men. In the studies analyzed, the Australian researchers found that, compared with abstainers and heavy drinkers, people who drank moderately had a lower risk of developing a variety of ailments, such as type 2 diabetes, heart attacks and strokes.

Dixon also cited his own studies, which have found that moderate drinking [helps the heart health of severely obese people](#). Another study found that overweight people lost more weight when moderate alcohol consumption was added to their daily diets.

But Dixon stresses, heavy drinking does cause health and social problems, and doctors should not encourage alcohol consumption for anyone who has a history of alcohol abuse. Pregnant women, as well

as people who are on certain medications or who have conditions that may worsen with alcohol, should also avoid drinking.

"We have carefully not suggested the prescription of alcohol to the nonconsumer," he said. "Rather, we are recommending that the family doctor recognizes that some alcohol consumption for many patients is beneficial and encourages the patient to continue a healthy practice."

Dixon added that misinformation on the pros and cons of moderate drinking is easily spread when doctors do not discuss the information with their patients. "Much on the effects of alcohol is discussed at the dinner party, not in the consulting room," Dixon said. "The effects are real and highly significant, and they should be well-known."

"We, as doctors, are obliged to give best evidence-based care," he continued. "Doctors who are 'anti' anything must accept evidence-based medicine or will not be giving the patient the benefit of best care. It should not be an emotional decision."