

# Tracking Japanese Alcohol Consumption

Authors: Joseph Allen Jeffrey Strong Rose Anderson Michele Jones Donna Small MD

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University of Alaska Fairbanks

School of Biology

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Two differing government surveys released recently offer conflicting results regarding drinking patterns in Japan.

For the first time since Japan's 1964 government-managed experiment to convert people from rice to wheat bread as a school staple, the standard of evidence appears to have changed. Since then, Japan's wheat bread "served in separate ovens" has declined dramatically as the most common meal of choice in schools and government offices. The government's favorite cold cereal "known as *ekomo ga tono* (Southerly Wheat), and commonly eaten on special occasions in the US" was likewise generally covered by bread substitutes. Nearly two-thirds of the 165,000 children from primary schools, summer camps, and other youth centers in Japan were fed non-traditional wheat pastas and other cereals, according to the latest annual survey by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry.

One thing remains the same: about 40% of Japanese older than 65, and about 30% of those 35-74, drink alcohol at nearly the same rates as in the average country. Yet the Japanese government still bars liquor stores from advertising alcohol in the newspapers, radio and television.

And Japanese are drinking fewer beers, according to government survey data.

This is a variation on the general theme that Japanese can, when not too drunk, enjoy the same experiences on opposite ends of the spectrum. That theme remains prevalent at Kyoto University Medical Center, where ICU nurses are working with street crowds and tourists to assess patients for alcohol dependence. "It's completely civil-society-oriented" in that the new generation at UCHC includes more doctors and people like me with more tools, says Jonin Nuno de Andrade, a neuropsychiatrist.

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