

The Guardian view on alcohol: drinking less is good for you

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

Alcohol is physically bad for you in any quantity; and the more you drink, the worse its health effects. The gigantic report on the subject published last week is unequivocal and authoritative. The report was based on enormous amounts of data: 28 million people around the world were examined in 592 studies to estimate the health risks.

The variety of ways in which alcohol can kill or damage people comes as a shock. It is the trade-off between cancer and heart disease which leads the researchers to reject the notion that moderate drinking has health benefits compared with abstinence: they find that the increased risk of cancers outweighs the diminished risk of heart disease among middle-aged moderate drinkers.

Perhaps the most startling single finding is that two-thirds of the world's population don't drink at all. They manage without a drug apparently essential to civilised life in the west. The question is whether those of us in the other third should try to emulate them.

Alcohol is bad for judgment and can promote a destructive solipsism. But it can also stimulate imagination, courage and friendship in a way that is hard to achieve otherwise. There is a reason why wine is tightly linked to paradise in religious poetry. A world without drink might find itself poorer as well as richer.

The report is right that many people should drink less than they do. Perhaps the real benefit of moderate drinking is not that it protects the heart, but that it requires a little self-discipline.

Summary: