



Drink lowers blood pressure risks

People with high blood pressure need not be teetotal and may benefit from a regular tippie, a US study suggests.

Men with hypertension reduced their risk of a heart attack by having a drink or two a day, the study in *Annals of Internal Medicine* found. But experts warned too much alcohol can raise blood pressure and said the findings should not be used as a licence to drink. They stressed that alcohol can harm and should not be used as a medicine.

For the 11,711 male healthcare professionals studied, moderate alcohol consumption (one or two glasses of beer, wine or shots of liquor) actually reduced the risk of a heart attack, even if they had high blood pressure.

Light drinkers, who consumed less than one drink every two or three days, did not have a lower risk of heart attack than non-drinkers, however.

A fine line

The study authors stressed that more than three drinks a day raises blood pressure and the risk of hypertension, adding, "so our findings are not a license for men with hypertension to overindulge".

However, lead author Joline Beulens, at the Harvard School of Public Health, added: "Because excess alcohol intake clearly increases blood pressure, many men with hypertension are counselled not to drink, but our results suggest that may not be necessary if men drink safely and responsibly."

Past research has shown that one way alcohol consumption decreases the risk of heart disease is by increasing the levels of "good" cholesterol and possibly thinning the blood.

Judy O'Sullivan of the British Heart Foundation said: "With alcohol consumption there is a fine line between benefit and risk.

"This study concluded that drinking alcohol in moderation is safe for men with high blood pressure. However, alcohol should not be used as a medicine and those who are teetotal do not need to start consuming alcohol to benefit their heart health.

"It should be remembered that drinking to excess carries serious health risks.

"If you want to improve your heart health our advice is to avoid smoking, eat a balanced diet low in salt and saturated fat and take regular physical activity," she advised.

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