

Alcohol and cardiovascular diseases

Alcohol has many effects on the cardiovascular system. When consumed in excess, it can act on the production of liver enzymes that affect the metabolism of cholesterol and other fats in the bloodstream. It may also affect blood pressure and have negative effects on the heart muscle, which can eventually cause heart failure. Heart problems related to excess alcohol consumption include strokes, myopathies (failure of the heart muscle due to injury to its cells), heart arrhythmias (irregular heartbeat) or sudden cardiac death. It is impossible to predict for whom excess alcohol consumption can become a problem.

Ingesting alcoholic beverages in moderation is a good idea. An average of one or two drinks daily for men and one for women could decrease the risk of heart disease and atherosclerosis (also called arteriosclerosis). Research is underway to study the apparent effects of drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages. In some populations, individuals could experience an increase in HDL (or "good") cholesterol or in anticoagulant properties. The best-known effect of moderate alcohol consumption is a small increase in HDL cholesterol. Doing physical exercise regularly is another way of raising HDL cholesterol. Niacin (one of the B complex vitamins) may be prescribed to raise HDL to a greater degree. Alcohol or some substances present in alcoholic beverages, such as resveratrol, could prevent blood platelets from adhering to each other. Aspirin helps reduce blood coagulation in a similar manner, in decreasing the formation of clots and, therefore, the risk of heart attack or stroke.