

Wine may protect against dementia

There may be constituents in wine that protect against dementia. This is shown in research from the Sahlgrenska Academy at University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

The findings are based on 1,458 women who were included in the so-called Population Study of Women from 1968. When they were examined by physicians they were asked to report how often they drank wine, beer, and liquor by selecting from seven categories on a scale from 'never' to 'daily.' The researchers know nothing about how much they drank on each occasion, or how correct the estimates were. For each beverage the women reported having drunk more than once a month, they were classified as a consumer of that particular beverage.

Thirty-four years after the first study, 162 women had been diagnosed with dementia. The results show that among those women who reported that they drank wine a considerably lower proportion suffered from dementia, whereas this correlation was not found among those who had reported that they regularly drank beer or liquor.

“The group that had the lowest proportion of dementia were those who had reported that the only alcohol they drank was wine,” says Professor Lauren Lissner, who directs the study in collaboration with Professor Ingmar Skoog, both with the Sahlgrenska Academy.

The researchers nevertheless are reluctant to make any recommendations regarding whether a woman should begin to drink wine, continue to drink wine, or increase their consumption. It's also important to point out that these findings cannot be generalized for men, who have a different pattern of drinking.

“We have to be very cautious when we interpret these results, since we can't see in this type of population study what is cause and what is effect. There may be other factors in women who drink wine that provide them with protection against dementia, factors that we can't measure. But the correlation found is a strong one and can't be explained by other factors that we can measure, such as education, BMI, and smoking,” says Lauren Lissner.

The researchers already knew that the drinking habits of Swedish women have changed over the last few decades. Today's women drink more wine and liquor, but less beer, than earlier generations did. The study shows, for example, that fewer than 20 percent of middle-aged women drank wine every week in the late 1960s. Today more than half of all women of that age report that they drink wine every week.

“These findings, in combination with the fact that women today drink more wine than 40 years ago, show that it is important to continue to do research on this correlation. In future analyses we will be studying the effect on more specific types of dementia, such as Alzheimer's disease. Other research methods will be needed in order to see what role wine and other alcoholic beverages play in the development of dementia,” says Lauren Lissner.

Source: Swedish Research Council

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