

Drinking alcohol may lower risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma

People who drink alcohol have a lower risk of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL) than non-drinkers, researchers at Yale's Department of Epidemiology and Public Health (EPH) write in an article published in Lancet Oncology.

Led by former EPH graduate student Lindsay M. Morton of the National Cancer Institute, the research team found that the protective effect of alcohol did not vary by type of alcohol consumed, and did not increase along with alcohol consumption. However, the protective effect of alcohol did vary by NHL subtype, and was greatest for Burkitt's lymphoma. Age, sex, family history of NHL, and history of cigarette smoking did not reduce the effect of alcohol consumption on NHL risk.

The findings come at a time when NHL incidence is rising throughout the world. In developed countries, NHL is the sixth most common cancer in men and the eighth most common in women. Previous studies examining the relationship between alcohol consumption and NHL risk have been inconsistent, likely due to small sample size resulting from stratification by NHL subtype and type of alcohol consumed.

"This study with a large sample size allows us with sufficient statistical power to analyze the data by type of alcohol consumed and disease subtype," said principal investigator Tongzhang Zheng, associate professor of epidemiology at EPH. "The resulting study was a pooled analysis of original data from nine case-control studies in the International Lymphoma Epidemiology Consortium (InterLymph), with a pooled study population of 15,175."

Susan T. Mayne, a nutrition epidemiologist at EPH and an author on the study said that further studies are needed to confirm the findings and to determine whether certain lifestyle factors or alcohol's immunomodulatory effects explain the association between alcohol consumption and decreased NHL risk.

Other authors on the study included Yale Professor Theodore R. Holford. Authors from other institutions included Elizabeth A. Holly, Brian C.H. Chiu, Adele Seniori Costantini, Emanuele Stagnaro, Eleanor V. Willett, Luigino Dal Maso, Diego Serraino, Ellen T. Chang, Wendy Cozen, Scott Davis, Richard K. Severson, Leslie Bernstein, Fred R. Dee, James R. Cerhan, and Patricia Hartge.

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