

A Scoping Review of the Effects of Moderate Alcohol Consumption in Older Adults

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Introduction: The results of past research on the effects of moderate alcohol consumption on health in older adults are inconclusive and often contradictory. Older adults are at higher risk of alcohol-related harm due to age-related physiological changes (e.g., decreased lean body mass, decrease enzyme efficiency) and so it is important to examine existing literature on the effects of moderate alcohol consumption to inform future research.

Method: A scoping review, was undertaken, following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines to identify the effect of moderate alcohol consumption on health in older adults. Articles that studied older adults (≥ 50 years) in longitudinal cohorts were eligible. The Scopus, MedLine and PsycInfo databases were searched (1-5-2022 to 1-6-2022). Three peer-reviewers assessed the articles and then the full text for eligibility with results extracted from the final selected articles and summarised.

Key findings: Forty-two cohort studies were identified that met the eligibility criteria. The definition of moderate drinking was not consistent. Research on the effect of moderate drinking on mortality, depression, mental health, health-related quality of life and dementia was often contradictory. However, there was consistent evidence that moderate drinking had a significant protective effect on bone health, and that moderate alcohol consumption has a significant linear dose-response relationship with cancer incidence and cancer related-mortality.

Conclusions: Evidence demonstrates that the effect of moderate alcohol consumption on health in older adults remains ambiguous. Standardising the definition of moderate alcohol consumption will facilitate comparisons between studies on the effect of moderate alcohol consumption in older adults.

Implications for Practice or Policy:

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