

Health

Drinking More Alcohol Is Associated With an Increased Risk of Melanoma

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Read this before you hit your next happy hour: New research has found a link between drinking alcohol and developing melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer.

The study, which was published in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, found the biggest association between drinking white wine and the development of invasive melanoma in white men and women. Surprisingly, the increased risk was greater for parts of the body that receive less sun exposure.

According to the American Cancer Society, there will be more than 76,000 new melanoma cases diagnosed in the U.S. in 2016, and more than 10,000 people are expected to die of the disease this year. Unfortunately, the rates of melanoma have been rising in the U.S.

The risk of melanoma is more than 20 times higher for people with light skin, the American Cancer Society reports. Having blond hair or skin that freckles or burns easily also raises a person's risk, but genetics can also be a factor.

For the study, researchers from Brown University analyzed data from three large prospective cohort studies in which 210,252 participants were followed for about 18 years. Scientists analyzed food-frequency questionnaires to figure out how much alcohol they consumed and how often.

Researchers discovered that any alcohol intake was linked with a 14 percent higher risk of melanoma per drink per day. And each glass of white wine a day was associated with an additional 13 percent increased risk of melanoma. However, other forms of alcohol, like beer, red wine, and liquor, did not significantly have an impact on a person's melanoma risk.

The link between alcohol and melanoma was greatest for the parts of the body that usually get less sun exposure. People who had 20 or more grams of alcohol a day (about a glass and a half of wine or less than two bottles of beer) were 2 percent more likely to have melanomas on their head, neck, arms, or legs but were 73 percent more likely to have them on their back or stomach.

What's going on here? Gary Goldenberg, MD, medical director of the dermatology faculty practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells Yahoo Beauty that he's not shocked by the findings. "Other studies have shown that patients who consume alcoholic beverages, especially more than the recommended amount, have been associated with increased rate of skin cancer," he says. However, Goldenberg says it may not actually be due to the alcohol itself. Instead, it may be the fact that those who tend to drink more than the recommended amount are also more likely to make other poor health decisions such as smoking, eating a poor diet, and having too much sun exposure, which is linked to the development of melanoma.

As for the increased risk of developing melanoma on the trunk, Goldenberg says that melanoma is mostly related to sunburn, but those areas of least sun exposure may have been burned in the past. Having a sunburn before the age of 18 and genetics are big factors in melanoma, he notes.

Goldenberg points out that this is an association study, meaning scientists found that people who drink more are also more likely to develop melanomas — not that drinking more causes melanomas. "One has to be very careful to draw conclusions," he says.

Goldenberg says you don't need to swear off your regular glass of wine based on these findings; you just need to be smart about it and your other lifestyle choices. "Having a healthy lifestyle, which includes sun avoidance and use of sunscreen, moderate alcohol consumption, no smoking, and a healthy diet, are all important," he says. "Poor lifestyle choices have been associated with skin cancer as well as other diseases."