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Moderate Alcohol Consumption Linked to Lower Mortality in Parkinson’s Patients, South Korean Study Finds

Nationwide research suggests mild to moderate drinking may offer protective effects, though experts urge caution in interpreting results

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A large-scale study from South Korea has found that people with Parkinson’s disease who drink alcohol in moderation may have a lower risk of death compared to those who do not drink. The research, published in the Journal of Neural Transmission, is the first nationwide investigation to examine the relationship between alcohol consumption and all-cause mortality among Parkinson’s patients.

Researchers used data from the Korea National Health Insurance Service, tracking 32,419 individuals newly diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease between 2009 and 2017. Participants’ drinking habits were self-reported through the National Health Screening Program. Over an average follow-up period of just over four years, 9,049 deaths were recorded among the study group.

The analysis revealed that mild drinkers had a 22% lower risk of death compared to non-drinkers, while moderate drinkers had a 31% lower risk. Heavy drinkers also showed a reduced risk, but this finding was not statistically significant. When researchers compared those who never drank to those who did, they found an overall 20% reduction in mortality for drinkers.

One notable finding was that patients who continued to drink after their Parkinson’s diagnosis had the lowest mortality rates. In contrast, former drinkers had a higher risk of death than those who never drank at all. Researchers suggest this may be due to the “sick-quitter” effect, where people stop drinking because of declining health, which can skew results.

The authors propose that alcohol could have neuroprotective effects that might slow the progression of Parkinson’s disease. This idea is supported by previous studies linking moderate alcohol intake—especially beer and red wine—with a lower risk of developing Parkinson’s. Compounds found in these beverages, such as polyphenols and resveratrol, are thought to reduce inflammation and support brain health.

The study’s results fit into a broader pattern seen in alcohol research known as the J-shaped curve. This describes how light-to-moderate drinking is often associated with better health outcomes than abstaining or heavy drinking. However, experts caution that these findings do not prove that alcohol directly causes longer life or better health outcomes.

There are important limitations to consider. Alcohol consumption was self-reported only once and did not specify types of drinks consumed. In South Korea, beer and soju make up nearly all alcohol consumed, so results may not apply to other countries or cultures with different drinking habits. The study also notes that most women in the cohort did not drink at all, which could affect the generalizability of the findings.

Despite these caveats, the research offers some reassurance for people with Parkinson’s disease and those interested in wine and beverage culture. The data suggest that moderate alcohol consumption is not harmful for this group and may even offer some benefit. The authors conclude that their findings point toward a possible protective effect of alcohol on disease progression in Parkinson’s patients.