



## WELLNESS WORKSHEET 54

### Could Alcohol Have Health Benefits for You?

Making general recommendations about alcohol and health is difficult because although there are some groups of people for whom light or moderate alcohol consumption may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD) and other chronic diseases, in other people, alcohol use is associated with serious adverse consequences. Experts agree that those who drink should limit alcohol use to no more than two drinks per day for men or one drink per day for women. (Heavy or binge use of alcohol under any circumstances is detrimental to health.) There is controversy, however, about whether there are any categories of current nondrinkers for whom beginning light alcohol consumption might be beneficial. The risks and benefits of light or moderate alcohol use depend on many individual factors, including personal and family health history. For people with certain characteristics or for anyone in certain situations, any consumption of alcohol is a potential health risk and should be avoided. Before turning to the decision charts about alcohol and health on the next page, complete the following checklist.

#### Personal Risk Factors Relating to Alcohol

Do you fall into a category that may indicate that any consumption of alcohol would be dangerous or illegal? Check any of the following that apply to you:

- \_\_\_ Under age 21
- \_\_\_ Family history of alcohol problems
- \_\_\_ Personal problems with alcohol or other drugs; past or present heavy alcohol use
- \_\_\_ Organ damage from alcohol use
- \_\_\_ Chronic liver disease, including hepatitis
- \_\_\_ Genetic risk of breast or ovarian cancer
- \_\_\_ Health condition worsened by alcohol use, including depression, uncontrolled high blood pressure, pancreatitis, and high triglycerides
- \_\_\_ Use of a medication, drug, or supplement that could potentially interact with alcohol (if unsure, check with your health care provider or pharmacist)
- \_\_\_ Pregnant or breastfeeding
- \_\_\_ For women: sexually active and not consistently using an effective contraceptive
- \_\_\_ Personal, moral, or religious beliefs that preclude alcohol use

***A caution about dangerous situations:*** Regardless of health status, no amount of alcohol should be consumed before driving, operating machinery, or engaging in any activity that requires alertness.

#### Making Decisions About Light or Moderate Drinking

The charts on the following page were designed by two physicians to help individuals consider the personal risks and benefits of light or moderate alcohol use; they apply to most people who did *not* check any of the risk factors listed above. They are designed to be used in consultation with a health care provider, and *no increase in alcohol consumption should be considered without a professional evaluation.*

#### Interpreting the Charts

The following definitions are used in the charts:

***Light/moderate drinking*** is up to one standard drink a day for women and up to two standard drinks a day for men.

***Heavy drinking*** is three or more drinks a day for men and two or more drinks a day for women.

(over)

**Coronary heart disease (CHD) risk factors:**

- Family history of CHD (father or brother younger than 55 with CHD, mother or sister younger than 65 with CHD)
- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Total cholesterol higher than 200
- HDL cholesterol lower than 35 (if HDL is higher than 60, subtract one risk factor)
- Age 40 or older for men, 50 or older for women

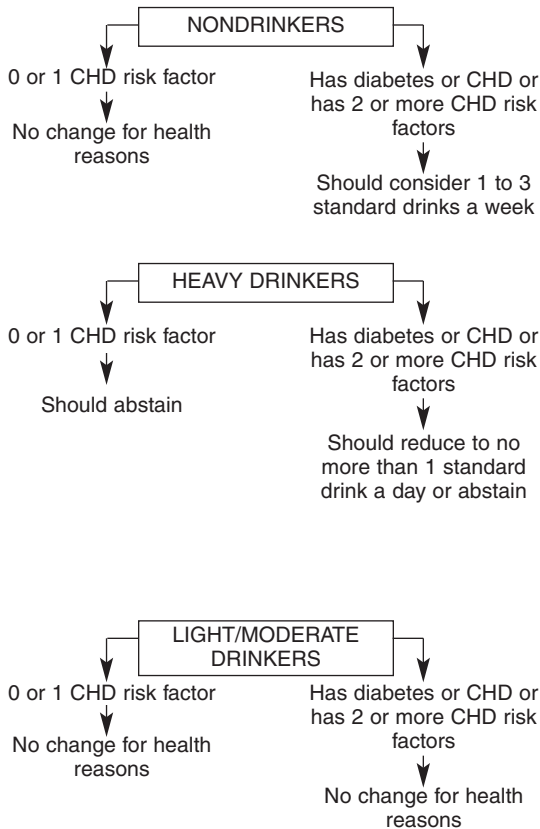
Note: Advice about alcohol use and CHD risk in no way reduces the importance of other risk factors. If you have any of the major controllable risk factors for CHD, *your most important health-related steps are to control those factors*: avoid tobacco, choose a healthy diet, engage in regular physical activity, achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, and work to control diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

Did you check any risk factors on the previous page? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no. If yes, then no level of alcohol consumption is likely to have a health benefit for you. If no, find and circle the box on the following charts that applies to you. Compare the recommendation to your current level of alcohol use.

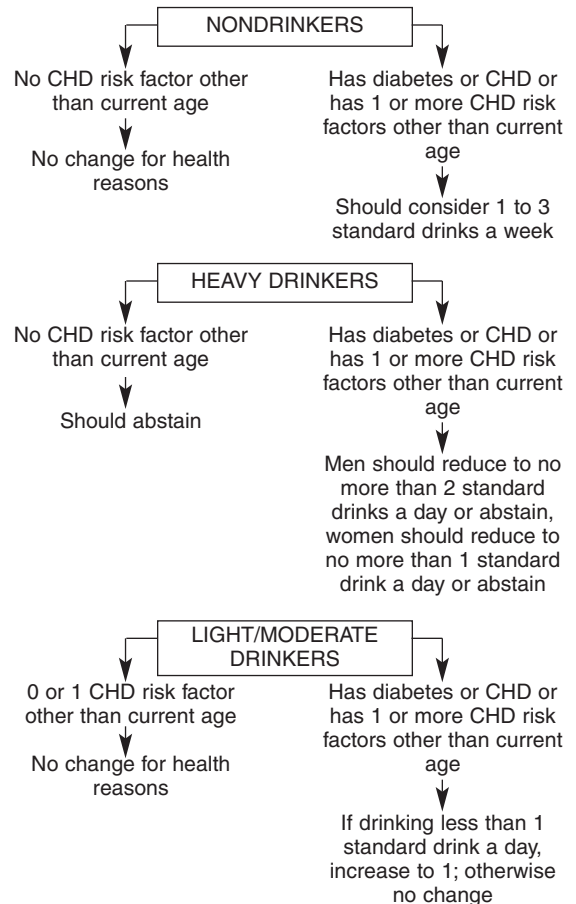
Current alcohol use: \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation from chart: \_\_\_\_\_

**Men Age 21 to 39/Women Age 21 to 49**



**Men Age 40 and Older/Women Age 50 or Older**



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