

Wine & Wellness

Peaceful Co-existence?



Throughout history, in practically every civilization, humans have used alcoholic beverages for many things other than pleasure:

social

religious

ritualistic

anesthetic/analgesic

to avoid water-borne pathogens

Evidence of alcohol residues found on shards

**Earliest found - 10,000 BC Neolithic Period (Stone Age)
wheat and barley beers in what is modern-day Israel**



Researchers now believe that a desire for a stable supply of alcohol could have motivated the beginnings of agriculture and non-nomadic civilization



Early on, in almost every civilization, people perceived that a little alcohol could be beneficial, but too much could be damaging to the body.

At times throughout history, per capita alcohol consumption was very high.

Although an accepted part of life, inebriation and drunkenness came to be considered coarse, and to demonstrate a lack of self-governance.



The idea of temperance as a virtue was founded in Greek philosophy, Eastern traditions such as Buddhism and Hinduism, and later, in Christianity



With the advent of industrialization, the need for a reliable and punctual work force became important. Factors converged to discourage the excessive consumption of alcohol and to emphasize sobriety.

First the bad news...

**What exactly is it about
alcohol that is harmful?**

At high levels...

- fundamentally affects DNA**
- damaged DNA is a major driver of cancer.**
- adds to free radicals in the body > oxidative stress > inflammation and cellular injury**

In the liver, high levels can cause fibrosis > cirrhosis

Can interfere with the brain's communication pathways

Over time, high intake can constrict the blood vessels > HTN

Cumulative over time.. taking a break can help undo the damage

Who should be careful?

Of the major cancers associated with alcohol consumption, liver and colorectal cancers have a higher incidence in people with high levels of drinking.

But increased incidence of breast and esophageal cancers are seen even in low-level drinkers.

If you have a family history, be especially mindful of intake, and have regular screenings.

Pregnant or nursing women; drug interactions
People with serious, chronic health conditions

Lots of conflicting evidence about alcohol related to health over the years -

We have heard everything from “moderate drinking promotes health” to the recent New York Times meta-study concluding that “no amount of alcohol is safe”

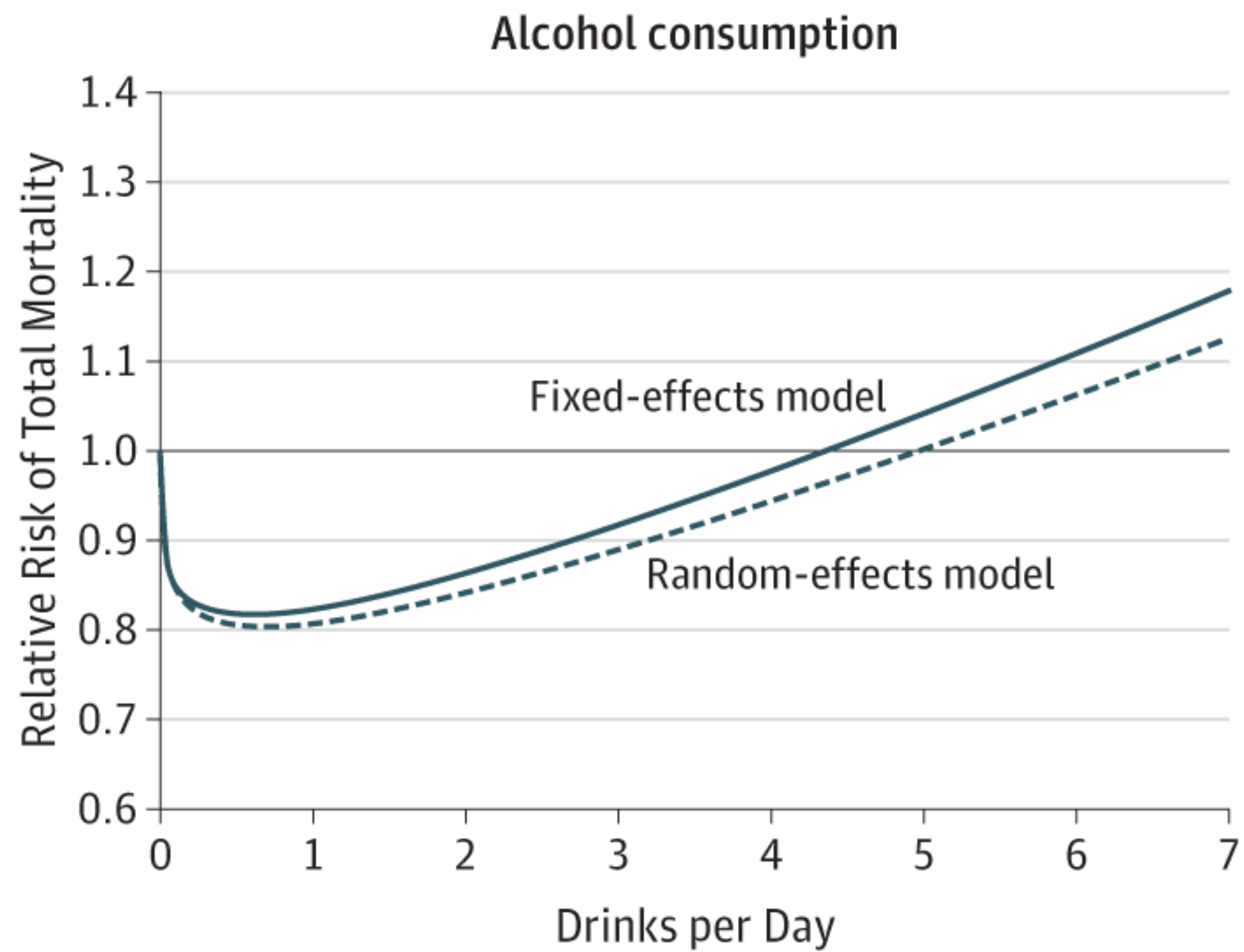
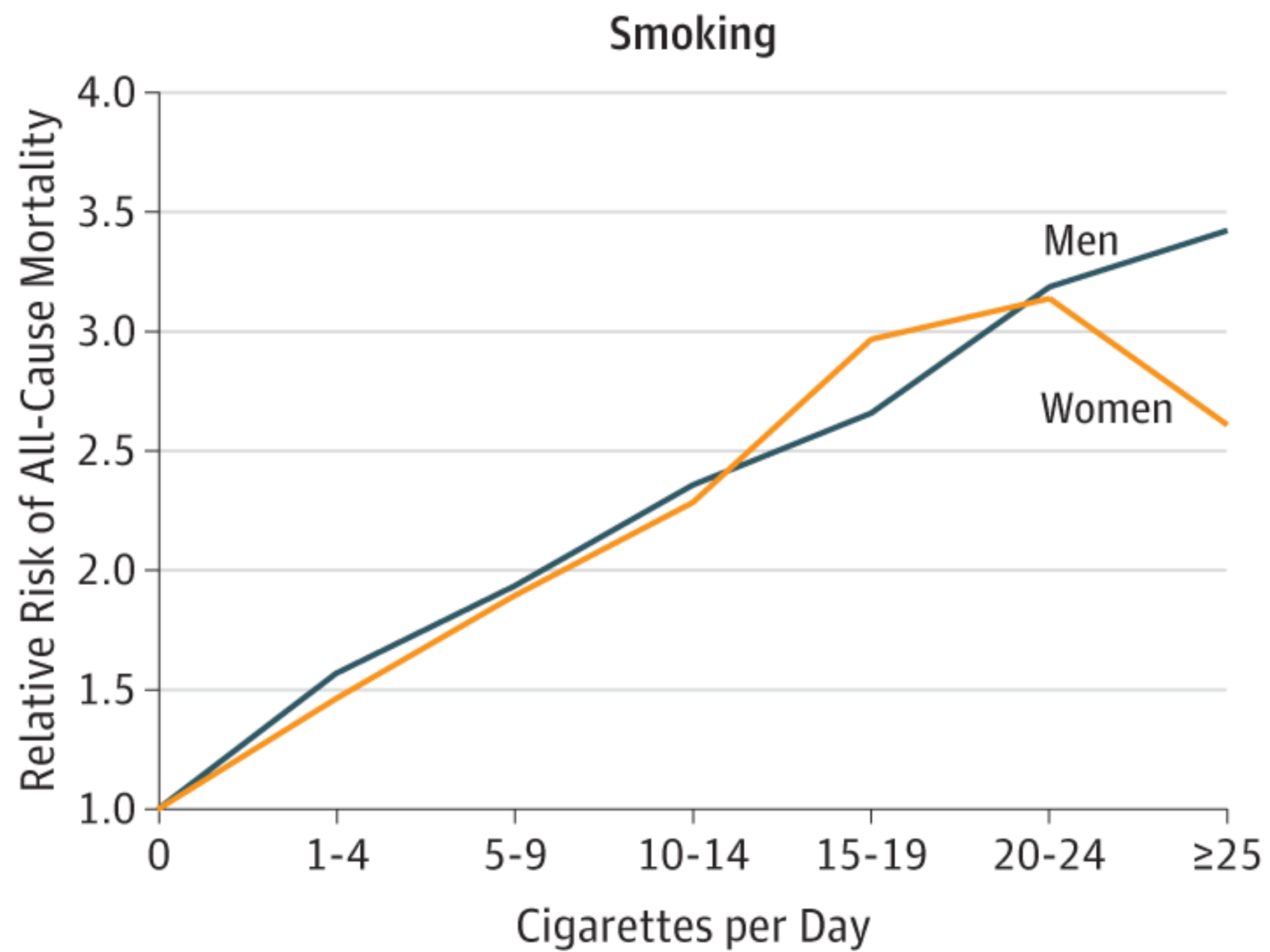
How many times have you seen something like this...

Sister Andre of France, who recently died at age 114, attributed her longevity to a daily glass of wine, and chocolate.



More confusion backstory ...

In 1924, a Johns Hopkins biologist, Raymond Pearl, published a graph with a J-shaped curve showing that the death rate from alcohol consumption, including all alcohol-related factors, was lowest in light-to-moderate drinkers - even lower than in abstainers. The graph seemed to demonstrate that a small amount of alcohol consumption was actually beneficial in that it was associated with a negative risk of mortality.





Similarly, In the 1980's, French epidemiologist Serge Renaud introduced the concept of “**the French Paradox**”, popularized by Morley Safer on "60 Minutes", in which he observed low mortality rates from coronary heart disease in the French population despite their high intake of dietary cholesterol and saturated fat.

It was speculated that perhaps it was their regular consumption of alcohol that had a protective effect.

The problem with the J-shaped curve and the French paradox is that they were observational. They established correlation but not causation.

The fact is that light-to-moderate drinkers tend to be moderate in all ways. They tend to be wealthier, better educated, are more likely to exercise and eat a healthy diet, carry a reasonable amount of weight, and have good healthcare. Even their teeth are better. They have a lot of things going for them health-wise that have nothing to do with their alcohol consumption.

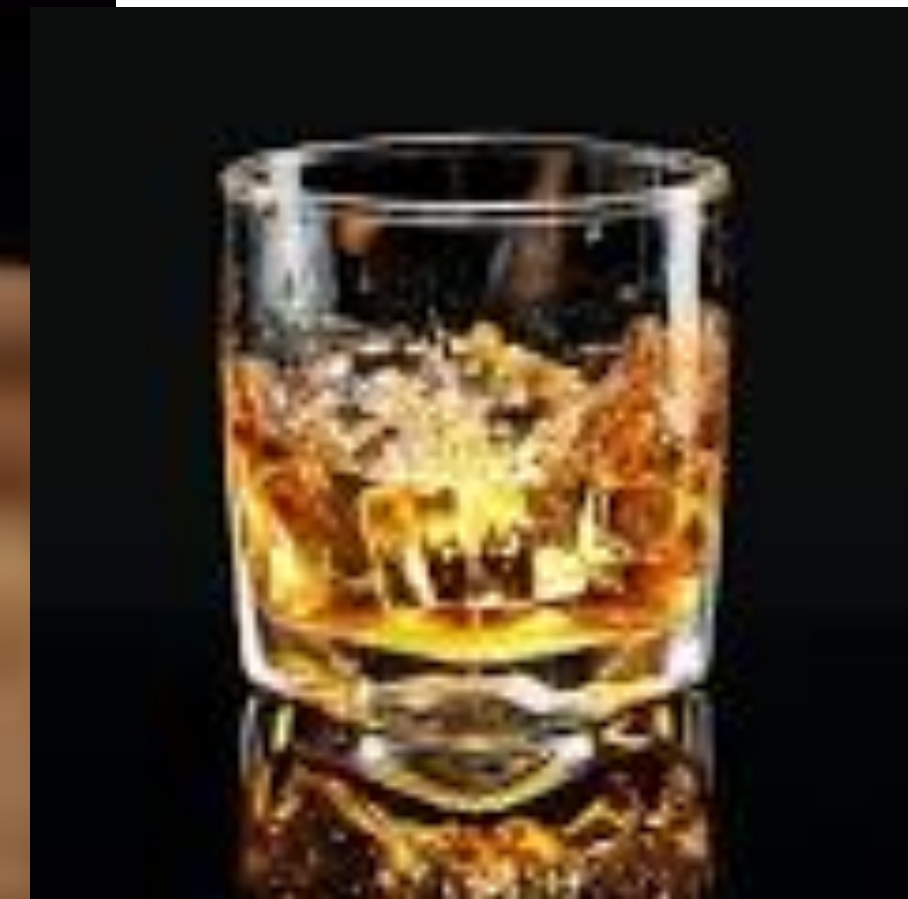
Similarly, the French eat on average less saturated fat, exercise more, eat smaller portions, consume more vegetables, and weigh on average less than their American counterparts.



It therefore appears that
**the diet and lifestyle factors
of moderate drinkers**
are the major contributors to what was once
thought to be the protective effect of having a
daily dose of alcohol.

But it's still not known for sure why we see this effect.

One of the problems with much of the research on alcohol is that wine has been lumped together with other forms of alcohol.



We know that wine - usually made from fruit - is very high in polyphenols such as resveratrol, anthocyanins, and other phyto (plant) chemicals. These are powerful antioxidants that help counteract the deleterious effects of free radicals on our DNA.

Coffee, tea, berries, leafy greens, nuts, and chocolate, also provide a healthy dose of polyphenols.



A meta-analysis of 25 articles published in “Nutrients” Journal in June 2023

“Association Between Wine Consumption and Cardiovascular Disease”

Conclusion:

“People who drink moderate amounts of wine are less likely to experience cardiovascular disease, heart disease, or death due to cardiovascular disease. This relationship appears to be strongest with red wine.”

“Resveratrol can relax blood vessels and reduce platelet aggregation (clotting). It also prevents the oxidation of ‘bad’ cholesterol (LDL)”

Although wine contains alcohol, and should never be thought of as a “health food”, if you’re going to have a drink, wine is likely a healthier choice than beer or spirits due to the beneficial effects of its polyphenols.

And Paula will tell you about wines that are grown and produced in such a way that you can have a good conscience about consuming them.





Wine is complex. It is meant to be savored and enjoyed rather than drunk right down, and we know that being with others in a pleasant social experience stimulates the brain and appears to help protect against decreased cognition.

Much of the beauty, depth and mystique of wine comes from the vast possibilities it offers, each subtly different and distinctive.

The Take-away...

According to U.S. dietary guidelines based on what we know today, the recommended “safe” limit of wine is

- 1 5-ounce glass per day for women**
- 2 5-ounce glasses per day for men.**

Women's bodies contain proportionately less water and more fat than men's. Water dilutes alcohol and fat retains it, so women's organs are exposed to higher concentrations of alcohol for longer periods of time.

Also, women have less alcohol dehydrogenase, an enzyme that breaks down alcohol before it reaches the bloodstream. At any given dose, a woman's blood levels of alcohol will be higher than a man's, even taking into account differences in body weight.

In conclusion, while more good (randomized, controlled) research is needed, especially about wine compared to other forms of alcohol, it's safe to say that given what we know today, moderate wine consumption as part of an overall healthy lifestyle is not harmful to the general population.

**As with any food associated with risk factors
- red meat, rich desserts, ultra-processed foods, etc.,
moderation is the key.**

**A reasonable amount, and even a bit more
occasionally,
is probably not going to harm you.**



The Golden Mean

“a state apt to exercise deliberate choice, being in the relative mean, determined by reason, and as the person of practical wisdom would determine.” - Aristotle

The Key - Moderation

