

CrossMark  
click for updates

## LETTERS

### NEW GUIDANCE ON DRINKING

## Alcohol consumption—the importance of context

Richard M Hoffman *senior lecturer*<sup>1</sup>, Mariette Gerber *expert*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield AL10 9AB, UK; <sup>2</sup>French Food, Environment and Work Safety Agency (ANSES), 94701 Maisons-Alfort Cedex, France

The new drinking guidelines do not adequately account for the complex interactions of alcohol with other factors in the diet.<sup>1</sup> For example, low to moderate alcohol consumption during a meal is an integral part of the Mediterranean diet, one of the healthiest diets in the world, which protects against cancer mortality even in the presence of alcohol.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence of increased breast cancer with a Mediterranean diet, and this may, at least in part, be linked to the protective effects against alcohol of folates in the diet.<sup>3</sup> In addition, a Mediterranean diet with low to moderate alcohol consumption reduced the incidence of cancers of the upper aerodigestive tract,<sup>4</sup> and low alcohol consumption was not a risk factor for these cancers in non-smokers in the Million Women Study.<sup>5</sup>

The Mediterranean diet is renowned for its cardioprotective effects, and alcohol seems to be an important part of this.<sup>6</sup> Recent epidemiological studies support the cardioprotective effects of low to moderate alcohol consumption and have compensated for possible confounding by heterogeneity among non-drinkers.<sup>7</sup>

Many epidemiological studies on alcohol do not take drinking patterns into consideration. Failing to adequately emphasise the importance of the context of alcohol consumption risks unnecessarily stigmatising responsible drinking with a healthy

meal, an activity that brings pleasure and stress relief for many people.

Competing interests: None declared.

- 1 Wise J. Cut drinking to reduce risk of cancer, says new guidance. *BMJ* 2016;352:i109.26747831.
- 2 Sofi F, Cesari F, Abbate R, Gensini GF, Casini A. Adherence to Mediterranean diet and health status: meta-analysis. *BMJ* 2008;337:a1344. doi:10.1136/bmj.a1344. 18786971.
- 3 de Battie J, Ferrari P, Chajes V, et al. Dietary folate intake and breast cancer risk: European prospective investigation into cancer and nutrition. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2014;107:dju367. doi:10.1093/jnci/dju367. 25505228.
- 4 Samoli E, Lagiou A, Nikolopoulos E, et al. Mediterranean diet and upper aerodigestive tract cancer: the Greek segment of the Alcohol-Related Cancers and Genetic Susceptibility in Europe study. *Br J Nutr* 2010;104:1369-74. doi:10.1017/S0007114510002205. 20500931.
- 5 Allen NE, Beral V, Casabonne D, et al. Million Women Study Collaborators. Moderate alcohol intake and cancer incidence in women. *J Natl Cancer Inst* 2009;101:296-305. doi:10.1093/jnci/djn514. 19244173.
- 6 D'Alessandro A, De Pergola G. Mediterranean Diet and cardiovascular disease: a critical evaluation of priori dietary indexes. *Nutrients* 2015;7:7863-88. doi:10.3390/nu7095367. 26389950.
- 7 Ronksley PE, Brien SE, Turner BJ, Mukamal KJ, Ghali WA. Association of alcohol consumption with selected cardiovascular disease outcomes: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ* 2011;342:d671. doi:10.1136/bmj.d671. 21343207.

Published by the BMJ Publishing Group Limited. For permission to use (where not already granted under a licence) please go to <http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions>