

FROM IWAGY MEMBER ARNIE SEROTSKY Caveats to this posting on IWAGY.org:

While I have a B.A. in Biology and Chemistry and an M.A. in Science Education, have studied at the graduate level Neurophysiology and Environmental Toxicology, and have taught Introductory Physiology to nursing students, I do not have the title of “doctor” (M.D. or PhD) after my name. I am reporting the following (with very few trivial wording condensations, but not to quotes) from the website the Wine Business Daily News Email that I subscribe to.

In recent years, the alcohol industry has received scrutiny regarding the safety of consumption. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared that “no level of alcohol consumption is safe for our health.” However, according to a recent report published by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM), moderate drinking actually comes with some health benefits, including a lower risk of all-cause mortality.

The report, “Review of Evidence on Alcohol and Health,” was conducted in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture using a Congressional allocation. The results are intended to help inform the U.S. Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which must be updated every five years by the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. By law, the recommendations — set to be updated in 2025 — must be grounded in the best available scientific and medical knowledge.

The NASEM brings together a large group of doctors, medical professionals, and scientists with particular expertise in relevant fields to evaluate the existing science. Each member must answer eight questions, including but not limited to whether alcohol causes cancer, the relationship between alcohol and cardiovascular disease, and how alcohol affects weight gain.

According to the report, scientists at this time can **conclude with “moderate certainty”** (Arnie’s bold) that those who drink alcohol in moderation have lower all-cause mortality than those who do not consume alcohol. Additionally, the committee concluded with the **same degree of certainty** (Arnie’s bold) that moderate drinking is linked to a lowered risk of cardiovascular disease in both men and women. While the rulings are positive — especially for those who imbibe on occasion — “moderate certainty” alludes to the fact that while present evidence exists supporting these claims, future studies may contradict it.

“The results on all-cause mortality should be incredibly reassuring to those who enjoy alcohol,” winemaker, physician, and cellular immunologist Dr. Tom Croghan told Wine Business. “Despite my concerns about selection bias and exposure measurement, I still wouldn’t call alcohol food or recommend a patient start drinking for health reasons, [but] the effect size is reassuring that moderate drinking is not harmful to cardiovascular health.”

The report also takes a crack at claims previously made by the WHO, including those arguing that alcohol consumption is linked to cancer. The United Nations agency has previously stated that elevated alcohol consumption causes, at minimum, seven types of cancer including mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, larynx, colorectal, and breast. In the organization’s opinion, this risk increases from the first drink, thus informing the argument that no consumption level is safe.

While NASEM supports the WHO’s claim regarding alcohol consumption increasing the risk of breast cancer with **“moderate certainty,”** it argues that there is not enough data yet to rule on other types of cancers. As the document outlines, (Arnie’s bold) “No conclusion could be drawn regarding an association between moderate alcohol consumption and oral cavity, pharyngeal, esophageal, or laryngeal cancers.”

“There has been intense downward pressure by anti-alcohol activists within the World Health Organization to steer government recommendations against any and all consumption of alcohol at responsible levels,”

representative for the Consumer Choice Center Stephen Kent said in a press release. “Consumers rely on unbiased government research to inform their dietary choices and NASEM delivered on their Congressionally-backed mandate to review alcohol’s impact on individual health.”

While the report is undeniably good news for those in the industry, it is only one-half of the reports that will be used to inform the updated DGAs. The second report is set to be conducted by the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD), which was launched by the Biden Administration’s HHS and is not sanctioned by Congress. Since its inception, the agency has been steeped in controversy, including claims from consumer advocates and Congressmen alike arguing that it lacks “basic transparency and independence from activists seeking to discourage Americans from drinking alcohol.” As such, the results of its findings could be drastically different from those of NASEM.