Smoking increases, while alcohol consumption may decrease risk of ALS

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A population-based case-control study of the rare but devastating neurological disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) has shown that the risk of such disease is increased among smokers, as has been shown previously. However, surprisingly, the risk of ALS was found to be markedly lower among consumers of alcohol than among abstainers.

Forum reviewers thought that this was a well-done and important paper, as it is a population-based analysis, with almost 500 cases of ALS, a very large number of cases for this rare disease. They were especially struck by the magnitude of the difference in risk of ALS between alcohol consumers and never drinkers: the risk among drinkers was about one half that of non-drinkers. Said one reviewer: "The results in this study are astonishing in this mysterious disease. One should expect that alcohol, as a toxic agent, rather should contribute to the development of ALS than to prevent it. The lower risk among drinkers compared with non-drinkers is remarkable"

Forum reviewers cautioned that the results of this paper should not be used to prompt people to consume alcohol just to prevent ALS, as it is such a rare disease. However, this paper presents important data that could help scientists understand the etiology of ALS and perhaps other more common diseases.

More information: de Jong SW, Huisman MHB, Sutedja NA, van der Kooi, AJ, de Visser M, Schelhaas HJ, Fischer K, Veldink JH, van den Berg LH. Smoking, alcohol consumption, and the risk of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis:A population-based study. Am J Epidemiol

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