

Should Christians Drink Alcohol?

**By Doctor John Ashton PhD., FRACI
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Each year the Australian alcohol industry spends hundreds of millions of dollars on alcohol advertising and promotion to get us to buy more beer, wine and spirits. One recent beer TV commercial showed a very attractive young woman, dressed up for a romantic date, stepping into a gondola. A moment later a wet fish is flicked against the front of her dress shattering the romantic ambience. Her male companion is shown as caring about his fish and his beer, and being indifferent to the plight of the woman. Not only do these types of ads associate alcohol with the put-down of women but they also devalue women's sexuality and there is a subtle irony here.

What most viewers of these commercials probably are not aware of is that alcohol feminises men. Yes, contrary to what many alcohol advertisements would have us believe, the more alcohol a man drinks the less of the maleness hormone, testosterone, a man's body produces. In fact, alcohol stimulates the liver to produce an enzyme that converts the male hormone testosterone to the female hormone oestrogen. Drinking substantial amounts of alcohol can even lead to feminine patterns of fat deposition such as breast development, and alcohol is probably the main cause of impotence in men over forty. (Why do you think there are the regular advertisements for cures for impotence in newspapers?)

Has anyone told you about these effects of alcohol before? Have you seen statements on any of the beer advertisements warning that excess consumption of this product may cause impotence and feminisation in men? This feminisation effect of alcohol has been known for many years . A search under "alcohol and feminization" on the US National Library of Medicine medical research data base <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query> reveals dozens of studies of this aspect of alcohol. But there is more.

Have you been told that alcohol is a known cancer-causing agent and in particular a risk factor for developing breast cancer. A report just published in the International Journal of Cancer (23 March 2006) calculates that worldwide, each year 232,900 people die from cancers caused by drinking alcohol.

Sadly however, alcohol not only affects our health but also our behaviour. A search of crime statistics suggests that drinking alcohol is a contributing factor in 50% of violent crime against women including sexual assault and domestic violence. The latest figures from The Australian Bureau of Statistics suggest that alcohol has been a significant factor involving harm to at least 1.5 million women over 15 years of age. In fact alcohol is the number one date rape drug used. But there is more. With child abuse notifications doubling over the past six years it is estimated that around 15% of Australian girls under 16 years will be physically or sexually assaulted by a male who has been drinking. Furthermore 25% of marriage break ups are attributed to an alcohol problem in the home.

Jesus taught we are to love one another (John 13.34) and that we are called to be a blessing to others (1 Peter 3.9). Alcohol on the other hand seems to facilitate un-Christian, selfish, uncaring behaviour, which is even illustrated by the commercial described earlier.

For Christians, the bottom line is that alcohol is a drug associated with worldliness and as Paul writes “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God”. (Romans 12.2).

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The burden of cancer attributable to alcohol drinking.

Boffetta P, Hashibe M, La Vecchia C, Zatonski W, Rehm J.

International Agency for Research on Cancer, Lyon, France.

We estimated the number of cancer cases and deaths attributable to alcohol drinking in 2002 by sex and WHO subregion, based on relative risks of cancers of the oral cavity, pharynx, esophagus, liver, colon, rectum, larynx and female breast obtained from recent meta- and pooled analyses and data on prevalence of drinkers obtained from the WHO Global Burden of Disease project. A total of 389,100 cases of cancer are attributable to alcohol drinking worldwide, representing 3.6% of all cancers (5.2% in men, 1.7% in women). The corresponding figure for mortality is 232,900 deaths (3.5% of all cancer deaths). This proportion is particularly high among men in Central and Eastern Europe. Among women, breast cancer comprises 60% of alcohol-attributable cancers. Although our estimates are based on simplified assumptions, the burden of alcohol-associated cancer appears to be substantial and needs to be considered when making public health recommendations on alcohol drinking. (c) 2006 Wiley-Liss, Inc.