



New Report Alcohol and Breast Cancer Risk

A recent report in JAMA, a premier medical journal, described the largest study to date on the issue of alcohol consumption and the risk of developing breast cancer.¹ The report examined 2.4 million person-years of follow-up. During the period of evaluation, 7,690 cases of invasive breast cancer were diagnosed making this the most robust study ever done on this subject.

In brief, the study demonstrated a small but statistically significant increased risk for developing breast cancer with the consumption of 3 or more alcoholic drinks per week. The type of alcohol did not seem to make any difference, thus a shot of whisky had the same effect as a 6 ounce glass of wine or one beer. This risk was in large part dependent on the lifetime pattern of alcohol consumption. The study basically concluded that the greater the lifetime exposure to alcohol, the greater the influence on the risk of getting breast cancer.

Just how much the risk is and just what should be done about it is less clear. For the average risk women the benefits of a glass or two of wine per week may overshadow the risks for getting breast cancer, particularly if the woman has a family or personal history of heart disease. However, for the high risk women and women who are very concerned about their personal risk of getting breast cancer, alcohol intake becomes an important risk that can be managed by the individual.

Most risk for breast cancer, such as family history and history of high risk biopsies are fixed. However, risk factors such as lack of exercise and post-menopausal obesity are manageable by the individual. Now that the risks associated with taking more than two ounces of alcohol per week has been established, women can now make more informed personal decisions on what to do when it comes drinking alcoholic beverages.

If you have question regarding the subjects of risk analysis or how alcohol influences risk, feel free to contact us.

¹ Chen WY, Rosner SE, Hankinson GA, et. al. *Moderate alcohol consumption during adult life, drinking patterns, and breast cancer risks*. JAMA. 2011;306:1884-1890.