In a recent study, people who reported not drinking any alcohol over several years were absent from work due to illness more often than low-risk drinkers.

For the study, which included adults from Finland, France, and the United Kingdom, women who reported drinking 1–11 units and men who reported drinking 1–34 units of alcohol per week were the reference group. (One drink/alcohol unit was estimated as 12 g of alcohol.) Compared with them, women and men who reported no alcohol use had a higher risk of sickness absence due to mental disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, diseases of the digestive system, and diseases of the respiratory system. Women who reported alcohol consumption of >11 weekly units and men who reported alcohol consumption of >34 units per week were at increased risk of absence due to injury or poisoning.

“Our findings demonstrate that the U-shaped association—higher risk of sickness absence among both abstainers and average drinkers—relates to a different set of diagnosis of sickness absence for the two groups,” said lead author Dr. Jenni Ervasti, of the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health.

“Some diseases, or their treatment, prevent alcohol use, which may explain the excess risks among abstainers. Moreover, participants to whom at-risk drinking causes health problems may be selected out from the labor market, that is, if they retire early or become unemployed. Then, the adverse effects are not seen in absence from work due to illness.”

Additional Information


About Journal

Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research was founded by the National Council on Alcoholism (now the NCADD). Alcoholism and alcohol abuse cause significant social and medical harm, and research into the etiology and consequences of alcohol use is essential to guide prevention, treatment and policy. Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research gives readers direct access to the most significant and current research findings on the nature and management of alcoholism and alcohol-related disorders. Each month this journal brings basic science researchers and health care professionals the latest clinical studies and research findings on alcoholism, alcohol-induced syndromes and organ damage. The journal includes categories of basic science, clinical research, and treatment methods.

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