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USE OF ALCOHOL: NOT SAFE AT ANY LEVEL

ALINA BALTAZAR

The safest level of alcohol consumption is zero. Alcohol is not a health beverage! Drinking while in college is risking your chances of success in school as well as your future health and happiness.

Alcohol is known to be a risk factor for early death and disability. It has been linked to some 60 diseases.¹ Although some studies have indicated that certain types of alcohol, in moderation, could help prevent heart disease, other research has challenged those results. There are anecdotal reports of centenarians who allegedly “prove booze helps you live longer,” but a groundbreaking study integrating global data from multiple sources, using a strong methodology, has recently published conclusions that are revolutionary

and definitive for world health. This new study, published in *The Lancet*, the world’s most prestigious and authoritative journal of medicine, examined alcohol use and its effect on health in 195 countries over a period of 25 years. This meta-analytic study covered a total of 28 million individuals.

STUDY RESULTS

The main finding of the study is that alcohol consumption is globally the seventh leading risk factor for death and disability. Worldwide, it is the number-one



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risk factor of early death for persons aged 15-49 years. These are not old people who are already at risk but include the typical university student. As the amount of alcohol consumed increases, so does the risk of mortality.

Alcohol has different effects on various parts of the body. When it is consumed regularly, there are adverse effects on the organs and tissues. Acute intoxication can lead to injury and alcohol poisoning, which accounts for the risk of binge drinking. Heavy use leads to dependency that frequently causes social impairment and mental illness. When the researchers looked at the amount of alcohol that could be considered safe, they found that the safest level of alcohol use was zero. Zero! Even half a glass of an alcoholic beverage a day was related to a shorter life span.

Results also showed that 32.5 percent of the world population drink (25 percent of females and 39 percent of males). There was a wide variation by region (1.5 percent in Nepal compared to 87 percent in Sweden). Alcohol consumption was greatest among countries with higher levels of income. These regions also consumed more alcohol per person, on average. Males consumed more alcohol than females. The study noted that 2.8 million deaths were attributed to alcohol use in 2016, more for men than for women.

The study found a small benefit in alcohol consumption in that alcohol may act as a protective agent against some types of heart disease. Women in higher-income regions had some protective effects against heart disease and diabetes after the age of 60. A wide variety of cancers accounted for a large proportion of alcohol-caused deaths. Thus, the benefits that some may receive at an older age are not worth the risk of higher cancer rates. Alcohol was also found to cause other cardiac issues

such as strokes and aneurisms as well as injuries and communicable diseases related to high-risk behavior while under the influence of this drug. The study also suggests that alcohol abstinence is the safest recommendation. Hence the “safest level of alcohol is none.”

WHY SHOULD A STUDENT CARE?

A student, fit and in good health, may not worry about the future risk of cancer, but he or she can experience the acute negative effects of alcohol consumption, too. University students are more likely to consume alcohol than their non-university peers.² This is due to less structured time, being away from parents for the first time, stress from school, wide availability of alcohol, and peer pressure from friends. Binge drinking is thought to be a rite of passage. According to a 2016 national survey in the United States, almost 60 percent of college students aged 18-22 had consumed alcohol in the past month, and around two out of three of those got drunk in that time frame. The negative effects on college students ages 18-24 in the U.S. include death (1,519 in a year), assault (696,000 each year), and sexual assault (97,000 each year).³

About one in four university students report academic problems due to alcohol use. Such problems include missing classes, falling behind in assignments, and doing poorly on tests and papers; all of which led to lower academic performance and grade-point average. Other serious consequences include higher risk of suicide attempts, health problems, injuries, unsafe sex, vandalism, property damage, and more involvement with the police. Heavy use can lead to an alcohol use disorder that is experienced by 20 percent of college students in the U.S. The heavy use tends to go down after college,

but those who do have a drinking problem as adults started drinking during teen and young adult years.

ALCOHOL, BEHAVIOR, AND WELL-BEING

The idea of alcohol abstinence is radical from a societal viewpoint. In *The Lancet* study, the recommendation is not coming from a conservative religious organization. Fifty-three researchers conducted this study as part of international collaboration. The findings of this study may be hard to believe or accept. Alcohol is part of human social fabric and celebrations, but the harm caused by its use has also been known for millennia.

Although the Bible does not condemn alcohol use, it does repeatedly condemn drunkenness (Proverbs 20:1; 1 Timothy 3:8; and 1 Corinthians 5:11). Being drunk was seen as foolish and leading to sin. Wine in biblical times had lower alcohol content and was often diluted with water. Distilling alcohol did not begin until after biblical times, and resulted in higher alcohol content in beverages, giving even more reason for concern. Intoxicating beverages are also repeatedly discouraged in the Qur'an,⁴ and followers of Islam are not encouraged to consume alcohol.

Some Christian denominations do teach alcohol abstinence. The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches as part of its fundamental beliefs that "our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit [and therefore], we are to care for them intelligently [and abstain from] alcoholic beverages" and other harmful substances.⁵ Adventist believers are expected to honor God with their bodies and not harm them. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also forbids alcohol consumption.⁶ As a result of the stand these two denominations have taken on abstaining from alcohol and along with other positive lifestyle choices encouraged by them, their members live 8-10 years longer than the general population, according to recently conducted research.⁷

A research study conducted among Seventh-day Adventist college students found that believing that the body is the temple of God acted as a protective factor from alcohol consumption. The survey, conducted on a Seventh-day Adventist campus, showed that when students agreed that God wants them to take care of their bodies by avoiding alcohol and drugs, they were 60 percent less likely to consume these prohibited items. In a follow-up qualitative study using focus groups, believing that the body is the temple of God was one of the identified factors in the role that religion plays in decreased alcohol use among Adventist college students.⁸

Students may rationalize, "Well, everybody's doing it!" This simply isn't true at public colleges/universities or Adventist colleges/universities. Yes, a majority of students at public institutions may consume alcohol, but not "everybody." In a Seventh-day Adventist insti-

Instead of turning to alcohol, there are many other ways to deal with social stress and problems.

tution of higher learning in the U.S.A., a majority has never consumed alcohol in their life and only 10 percent report doing so regularly.⁹

COPING WITHOUT ALCOHOL

As mentioned before, alcohol has been a part of society for millennia. It is not only used for celebrations and ceremony, but also as a way to cope with life's stresses. We live in a sinful world that has a multitude of problems to deal with. Alcohol is seen as a way to escape problems, to relax at the end of the day, and to party on the weekends in order to release stress. But those problems are still there after one becomes sober, and often those problems are made worse by alcohol consumption. Drinking alcohol doesn't actually relax the body the way those who drink assume. While consumption may make one feel sleepy and relaxed, it actually interferes with the quality of sleep. Those who stopped drinking alcohol after consuming it regularly to help them sleep, found they were actually able to sleep better once they quit.¹⁰ It may help one feel less nervous in social situations, but it also lowers inhibitions that can lead to doing things one regrets later. Those alcohol-infused parties may actually lead to unintended consequences like sexual assaults, alcohol poisoning, drunk driving, fights, and criminal activities.

Instead of turning to alcohol, there are many other ways to deal with social stress and problems. Adventist university students report many such alternatives such as socializing with friends, exercise, prayer, sports, reading, spiritual meditation, going to the beach, checking social media, and listening to music.¹¹

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Ellen White, one of the founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, wrote more than a century ago that the use of alcohol is harmful to the body. "The youth and children should understand the effect of alcohol, tobacco, and other like poisons in breaking down the body, beclouding the mind, and sensualizing the soul. It should be made plain that no one who uses these


things can long possess the full strength of his physical, mental, or moral faculties.”¹² The Bible teaches us to care for our bodies. The Seventh-day Adventist Church expects members to not consume alcohol. A blend of religious and health reasons counsels us to stay away from alcohol. As Adventist students, you can do much.

HERE ARE THREE SIMPLE THINGS YOU CAN DO:

1. **De-normalize alcohol consumption.** Not “everybody’s doing it!” even on public campuses and especially not on Adventist campuses. Alcohol does not have to be a part of the college experience. There are just too many risks involved.
2. **Be a caring friend.** When you have social get-togethers, avoid alcoholic drinks. Make your parties wholesome. Get creative, and have fun! Whatever you do, do to the glory of God. You will be helping your friends as well as yourself.
3. **Develop healthy coping tools in dealing with emotional or social stress.** Research and clinicians offer some specific suggestions:
 - a. Go for a walk, exercise, or participate in sports.
 - b. Get enough sleep; you will feel so much better.
 - c. Learn better time management—you can’t do it all!
 - d. Try different relaxation techniques—look for some apps.
 - e. Talk to your friends; they understand what you are going through.

If you have experienced trauma in your life that is impacting you or if you are struggling with mental stress or illness, there are licensed mental-health professionals who can help you sort your difficulties and reach for health. Many campuses have counseling services; take advantage of these resources.

CONCLUSION

Alcohol is toxic! It is a known carcinogen and is linked to many social problems in society. Alcohol is the number-one risk factor for early death and disability among those who are age 15-49.¹³ Researchers report the safest level of alcohol consumption is zero. Alcohol is not a health beverage! Drinking while in college is risking your chances of success in school as well as your future health and happiness. Alcohol increases your risk for an early death. You can be a positive force by making better lifestyle choices for yourself, encouraging your friends to make positive changes, and making a difference in society by reaching out through social media. There is no better time than now to spread the message! 

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