Body Mass Index Skews Alcohol Benefits

In the November issue of Diabetes Care, a study is reported on showing that body mass index may change the positive effect of light to moderate alcohol consumption.

Ronny A. Bell, PhD, MS, et al., of the department of public health sciences at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is quoted as saying "Light-to-moderate alcohol consumers no longer have a significantly better [insulin sensitivity] profile once indexes of body composition are considered." He goes on to say that "this study contradicts previous research showing a positive effect of light-to-moderate chronic alcohol consumption on [insulin sensitivity] in that the relationship was shown in this analysis to be attenuated by body composition — a known CVD risk factor."

While not involved in this study, Ronald Watson, PhD, professor in the College of Public Health and School of Medicine at the University of Arizona in Tucson and the former head of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism for 6 years, commented that "I and the NIH conclude that increasing alcohol use will benefit a few by lowering heart disease a little, while increasing the chances of damage to many by addiction."

Speaking to WebMD, Dr. Bell said "In the first part of our analyses, we did in fact show that light-to-moderate drinkers had a better insulin profile compared to never drinkers and heavy drinkers. It also seemed to be the case that consistent drinkers had better profiles than binge-type drinkers. However, when we considered a person's body composition — body mass index and central obesity — this U-shaped relationship disappeared."

Dr. Bell finishes by saying, "Alcohol is by no means a safe drug, nor something that can in any way be recommended for health promotion. Suggesting that alcohol is somehow beneficial is so outweighed by its toxicity as to be criminal."