













# ALCOHOL BEVERAGES AUSTRALIA

Rather, the authors of both of the reviews concluded that further research was required to understand the role played by factors such as gender, the propensity for individuals to gain weight, the type and quantity of beverage consumption in relation to weight gain.

Most consistently studies have shown that low-to-moderate levels of alcohol consumption can have a protective effect on body weight. In a study analysing the association between obesity and alcohol consumption of 8,236 adults, found that current drinkers had lower odds of obesity when compared to non-drinkers<sup>7</sup>. In particular, the authors of the study observed a J-shaped curve when examining the relationship between alcohol consumption. Adults who reported consuming 1-2 alcoholic beverages a day had lower odds of obesity as compared to non-drinkers. In contrast, adults engaged in binge drinking had the highest odds of obesity in the entire cohort.

Similarly, a 2018 study analysing the associations between body composition and drinking patterns of 36,028 adults, found a similar J-shaped association with Body Mass Index (BMI) and the waist circumference of adults and their alcohol consumption<sup>8</sup>. Authors found that men and women who consumed between 1-2 drinks per day had a lower BMI and waist circumference as compared to ex-drinkers and non-drinkers. In contrast, the authors found that those consuming larger amounts of alcohol in one week were more likely to have higher BMI and waist circumference, than those consuming low-moderate amounts or non/ex-drinkers.

Additionally, both studies found a negative relationship with the frequency of alcohol consumption, where adults who consumed alcohol more frequently had lower a BMI and waist circumference as compared to adults who drank infrequently<sup>9</sup>. These findings show that in contrast to the current assumption that alcohol consumption leads to obesity, regular consumption of low-to-moderate amounts of alcohol can have a protective effect against rate of overweight/obesity. However, research evidence does show that harmful levels of consumption are at greater risk of obesity. These conclusions are supported by the findings of Breslow and Smothers<sup>10</sup>, who found that amongst adults who consume alcohol, those that consume small amounts frequently had a lower BMI than those consuming higher amounts of alcohol infrequently.

### *Australian Lived Experience*

Given that causation cannot be determined in the relationship between alcohol consumption and obesity, it is increasingly important to consider the lived experience of adults in Australia.

Over the last forty years Australia has seen a continued increase in the proportion of the population that is either overweight or obese. In fact, the rate of being overweight/obese in Australia has grown

---

<sup>7</sup> Ahmed A. Arif and James E. Rohrer, "Patterns of Alcohol Drinking and Its Association with Obesity: Data from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1988-1994," *BMC Public Health* 5, no. 126 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-5-126>.

<sup>8</sup> M.E.J. Lean et al., "Different Associations between Body Composition and Alcohol When Assessed by Exposure Frequency or by Quantitative Estimates of Consumption," *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 31, no. 6 (2018): 747-57, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jhn.12583>.

<sup>9</sup> Arif and Rohrer, "Patterns of Alcohol Drinking and Its Association with Obesity: Data from the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, 1988-1994"; Lean et al., "Different Associations between Body Composition and Alcohol When Assessed by Exposure Frequency or by Quantitative Estimates of Consumption."

<sup>10</sup> Rosalind A Breslow and Barbara A Smothers, "Drinking Patterns and Body Mass Index in Never Smokers: National Health Interview Survey, 1997-2001," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 161, no. 4 (2005): 368-76, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwi061>.

