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## Alcohol a double edged sword

Contrary to what doctors were taught in medical school, alcohol prevents osteoporosis. Dr. Francis Williams who is head of the Twin Research and Genetic Epidemiology Unit at St. Thomas Hospital in London has studied 1,000 twins. Osteoporosis is 80 percent genetic and 20 percent environmental.

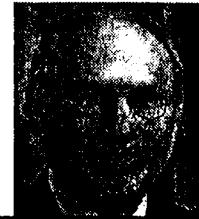
Although alcoholism is hereditary, social and environmental factors can strengthen this disease much more than other hereditary problems such as obesity. A bone mineral density and other bone markers were inversely related to alcoholic intake. The twin who drank the most had the highest bone density! In a separate analysis with these twins, the well-known confirmation that smoking does cause osteoporosis was proven.

In another research paper the landmark Nurses Health Study, which included 50,000 women for over 25 years, showed good results with alcohol, but this time for the prevention of dementia. This is the opposite of what is commonly thought, that alcohol does impair cognitive function. The more one drinks, the more likely they are to have dementia. Now, the data studies show it has an apparent protective effect as well on osteoporosis. In a paper presented by Dr. Francine Grodstein at the annual American Academy of Neurology meeting recently, there was a positive association between moderate alcohol intake and better thought processes as these nurses became older. This study sponsored by NIH involved 120,000 nurses age 30-55 that began in 1976. A group of communi-

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ty dwelling women ages 70-81 were interviewed between 1995 and 2001. They were given a battery of cognitive function tests over the telephone, and repeated at two-year intervals. The women could not consume more than three drinks a day, be on antidepressant medications, or have a history of stroke at baseline. Finally 12,000 women met the criteria used in this study, which showed moderate alcohol consumption improves memory in the elderly.

We know that alcohol tolerance in women is less than that of men. This has been studied on younger premenopausal women. It seems that women do not metabolize alcohol in the liver like men. It has not been shown whether this metabolism changes with menopause. However, it generally felt that women of all ages cannot handle the same amount of alcohol as men. The incidence of alcohol side effects to include impaired reflexes and cirrhosis of the liver happens more commonly with less alcohol in women than in men. We also know that obesity causes an impaired liver and a propensity towards cirrhosis in both men and women, and in general women are fatter than men.