



## Effects of wine on older people



### Introduction

Between 2006 and 2016, the proportion of people aged 65 years and over increased from 13.0% to over 15.0% (as shown in Figure 1). Older Australians aged greater than 65 years generally drink fewer alcoholic beverages such as wine during any one session than younger Australians, but they often drink alcoholic beverages every day. They generally reduce or stop their drinking when they have health problems.

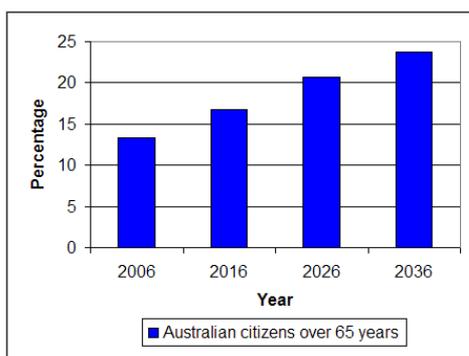


Figure 1. Australia's ageing population from ABS Population Projections (2016)

### Did you know? - the bad news

As you get older, your body's ability to 'tolerate' the alcohol contained in wine decreases because as you age:

- you lose body water and gain fat, so that your ratio of body water to body fat decreases and there is less water to dilute the alcohol. An older person who drinks the same amount of wine as a younger person will, therefore, have a higher blood alcohol concentration (BAC) than the younger person.
- blood flow to your liver is decreased, and the liver enzymes that break down alcohol are slower. The toxic alcohol, therefore, stays in your liver longer before it is moved into the general bloodstream or broken down, which increases the risk of damage to your liver.



- mental and physical functions also decrease including coordination, vision, hearing and reaction time, increasing the risk of accidents, such as falls and car crashes.

In addition, the alcohol contained in wine can interact with over-the-counter and prescription medicines that you may also be taking.

The effects of alcohol on the brain are increased by medicines that slow down the brain such as sleeping pills, anti-histamines, anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs, and some painkillers.

Alcohol and medicines such as antibiotics, anti-blood clotting, anti-high blood pressure and anti-diabetic drugs may also be broken down in the liver by the same enzymes, so that a higher blood alcohol concentration or a higher blood concentration of medicine may occur with unwanted side effects from either alcohol or the medicine.

## Did you know? - the good news

As you get older, the relationship between the amount of wine that you drink and your risk of developing certain diseases and disorders is generally j-shaped. For example, when you drink a light to moderate amount of wine your risk is decreased for:

- the grouping of diseases and disorders that involve the heart and the blood vessels (arteries and veins), which includes atherosclerosis (hardening and rigidity of the artery wall), high blood pressure, heart attacks, heart failure and strokes (either from blockages or ruptures of brain blood vessels);
- dementias, and your ability to perceive, reason, remember and think is improved;
- depression; and
- bone loss.

Your risk of developing certain diseases and disorders is increased, however, when you continuously drink heavy or excessive amounts of wine.

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## Contact

For further information, please contact:

Dr Creina Stockley

**Phone** 08 8313 6600 **Fax** 08 8313 6601

**Email** [helpdesk@awri.com.au](mailto:helpdesk@awri.com.au)

**Website** [www.awri.com.au](http://www.awri.com.au)

**Address** Wine Innovation Central Building,  
Corner of Hartley Grove & Paratoo Rd,  
Urrbrae (Adelaide), SA 5064