The End of Happy Hour

Recent research sponsored by the Welcome Trust has turned the spotlight on the dangers of consuming alcohol to the extent that there is **No Safe Level of Alcohol Consumption.**

This study of 25,000 adults in the UK is one of the largest studies of alcohol and brain health. There have been previous studies that indicated a small amount was protective but this study found that this was not to be the case. "We found that at any level, alcohol was associated with poorer brain health compared to no alcohol".

The researchers evaluated the brain health on the basis of structural and functional brain measures using MRI scanning of 25,378 adults. Participants included 6,912 never drinkers, 617 former drinkers and 24,069 current drinkers. Median alcohol intake was 102g weekly (about 2 litres of beer).

University of NSW Fellow at the Centre for Healthy Brain Ageing, Dr Mewton says, "There is an undeniable cumulative effect of alcohol use on cognitive health across the life span. It leads to poorer white matter development, small to moderate deficits in cognitive function and can even cause significant brain shrinkage. "

While alcoholism among the elderly is rare, Dr Mewton says, "it is one of the strongest risk factors for all types of dementia, particularly early onset, compared with other risk factors such as high blood pressure and smoking."

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on alcohol use increased consumption with 12% of Australians now consuming alcohol on a daily basis since the pandemic began, with many who did not drink regularly before having now picked up the habit.

The increasing incidence of diseases positively associated with alcohol might come as a suprise to many people as there is a general lack of recognition among Australians that alcohol increases the risk of all-cause mortality. For example, there is 'no safe level' of alcohol consumption for the seven types of cancer caused by alcohol.

The take home message: Try a few of the non-alcoholic beers and wines - you might find some you like.

Geoff