Association between alcohol and cardiovascular disease: Mendelian randomisation analysis based on individual participant data.

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Association between alcohol and cardiovascular disease: Mendelian randomisation analysis based on individual participant data
Introduction

Alcohol is the fifth leading risk factor for death and disability accounting for 4% of life years lost due to disease. While the harmful effects of alcohol on conditions such as liver cirrhosis, injuries, and cancers of the liver, colorectum, breast, and upper aerodigestive tract have been firmly established, uncertainty remains concerning the potential protective effects of light to moderate alcohol consumption on risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Observational studies have consistently reported that compared with non-drinkers, light to moderate drinking exhibits a reduced cardiovascular risk, with the lowest risk found at approximately 12-25 British units per week, while heavier and more hazardous drinking is associated with an increased risk, resulting in the well established U shaped association. However, the apparent cardioprotective effect associated with light to moderate drinking could be explained by an elevated cardiovascular risk from underlying poor health in non-drinkers, or confounding by lifestyle or social factors associated with light to moderate drinking.

The most widely proposed mechanism for this purported cardioprotective effect of alcohol is an increase in high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol. However, the causal nature of the association of HDL cholesterol with cardiovascular events is unclear. Although an HDL cholesterol raising effect of alcohol has been reported in experimental studies, the small sample size and short follow-up means existing studies may be prone to bias, undermining their validity. In the absence of a viable randomised trial to confirm or refute the cardioprotective effect of light to moderate alcohol consumption, an alternative approach is to use a genetic variant that serves as a proxy for alcohol consumption. This approach, known as Mendelian randomisation, avoids some of the key limitations of observational studies, since allocation of genetic variants is random with regard to potential confounders, and genotype is not modified by disease (abolishing reverse causality).

A non-synonymous single nucleotide polymorphism (rs1229984) in the alcohol dehydrogenase 1B gene (ADH1B), which encodes the ADH1B enzyme, which provides the primary pathway of alcohol metabolism, has been associated with a flush response to alcohol consumption, lower levels of usual alcohol consumption and blood ethanol levels, as well as a lower risk of alcohol dependence among adult drinkers and adolescents, which led to the selection of this single nucleotide polymorphism as a genetic instrument in previous Mendelian randomisation studies that investigated the role of alcohol in high blood pressure and various cancers. We present results from an international collaboration that used the ADH1B rs1229984 variant as an instrument to investigate the association of alcohol with cardiovascular biomarkers and events in more than 260,000 individuals.
Methods

Formation of the consortium

Given that the rs1229984 genetic variant is not represented in widely available genotyping platforms such as Illumina-metabochip, Illumina-immunochip, or genome-wide association platforms (with the exception of recent platforms), we initially focused on studies genotyped with the IBC CardioChip array, which contains this single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP). Through contact with the designer of the Institute for Translational Medicine and Therapeutics (ITMAT) Broad Institute CARe consortium (IBC CardioChip array (B J Keating,24 coauthor), we contacted all population based studies genotyped on this array. Subsequently, we established contact with a series of genetic study groups with whom we have collaborated in the past and sent them a brief proposal describing the general aims of the study, including de novo genotyping in their studies. A minor subset of studies in European descent population that used this variant in previous publications was also identified and included in the consortium (details available in table S1 in the appendix on bmj.com). In addition, we checked publicly available consortia such as CARDIoGRAMplusC4D (www.cardiogramplusc4d.org) and found the SNP was not included in these consortia.

We incorporated individual participant data from 261 991 participants of European ancestry from 56 studies (see appendix). All participants provided written, informed consent, and ethical approval was granted by local ethics committees for participating studies. Ethical approval for secondary data analysis was granted by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine ethics committee (application No 5905).

Alcohol traits

The principal alcohol trait was weekly volume of alcohol in British units (1 British unit is equivalent to 0.57 US units or 10 ml (7.9 g) ethanol), which we derived using questionnaire data from each study (table S2 in the appendix). We additionally assessed the overall drinking status (drinkers v non-drinker) of study subjects, the study specific top tertile of alcohol consumption (separately for men and women), and history of binge drinking (for details see supplementary methods 2.1). γ-glutamyl transferase was used as a marker of heavy alcohol consumption.

Clinical outcomes

The primary clinical event was incident and prevalent (including fatal and non-fatal) coronary heart disease. Secondary clinical outcomes were stroke and type 2 diabetes. Stroke included all subtypes and consisted of incident and prevalent (including fatal and non-fatal) cases. In a subsample, information on ischaemic stroke was also available. For type 2 diabetes, we restricted the analysis to prevalent cases with the exception of one nested case-cohort that included incident cases.25 Precise definitions of outcomes for each study are reported in table S3 of the appendix.

Genotype properties

Genotyping platforms, genotype frequencies, Hardy Weinberg equilibrium P values, and call rates (median of 98.8%) for ADH1B rs1229984 (directly genotyped in all studies) are listed in table S1 and figure S1 of the appendix.
Appendix for further details). The same stratified analysis was conducted for potential confounders, to investigate if confounding was reintroduced by stratifying by alcohol. For units/week of alcohol consumption (our main alcohol phenotype), we also performed a subgroup analysis according to the type of alcohol (beer, wine, spirits) and all beverages combined. Exploratory subgroup analyses were undertaken to assess the impact of study characteristics included sex, mean age, geographical region, Hardy Weinberg equilibrium, genotype platform, year of DNA extraction, and, whether the study contributed to observational analysis.

In order to investigate potential residual confounding by population stratification, we adjusted for principal components derived from IBC CardioChip in studies with available data (see supplementary methods 2.4 for further details). To evaluate confounding by linkage disequilibrium between rs1229984 with single nucleotide polymorphisms associated with cardiovascular risk factors in genome-wide association studies that could distort associations of rs1229984, we used the Whitehall-II cohort (including both IBC CardioChip and MetaboChip platforms).

In the current manuscript, we did not conduct an instrumental variable analysis to estimate causal effects since the available methods assume a linear association between the exposure and the outcome, which may not hold for alcohol and cardiovascular disease.

Analyses were conducted in Stata v13.0 (StataCorp, Texas, USA). All P values reported are two sided.

Results

We approached 59 studies, of which 56 were included in this collaboration. Of the three excluded studies, two (INTERHEART and INTERSTROKE) declined to participate because of overlap with existing projects, and a third (CoLaus) was excluded as the rs1229984 genetic variant was not directly genotyped.

Of the 261,991 participants in our analysis, 48% were women, and the mean age per study was 58 years (range 26-75 years) (table S4 of appendix). The median number of alcohol units consumed in each study is shown in table S4. There were 20,259 coronary heart disease events, 10,164 stroke cases (4,339 ischaemic strokes) and 14,549 type 2 diabetes cases (table S5). Means and distributions for continuous traits in all studies are presented in tables S6-S8. The observational analysis between alcohol and cardiovascular risk factors is reported in the supplementary results section and figures S2 and S3 of the appendix.

Genetic association analysis

ADH1B and alcohol consumption

Carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele consumed fewer units of alcohol per week (−17.2% units/week (95% confidence interval −19.4% to −15.6%)) and had lower odds of being in the top third of drinking volume (odds ratio 0.70 (0.68 to 0.73)) compared with non-carriers. Rs1229984 A-allele carriers also had lower odds of binge drinking (odds ratio 0.78 (0.73 to 0.84)), increased odds of being self reported abstainers (odds ratio 1.27 (1.21 to 1.34)) and lower levels of γ-glutamyltransferase (−1.8% (−3.4% to −0.3%) (table 1)).

The association of the rs1229984 A-allele with alcohol volume remained unaltered when stratified by age, gender, geographical region, Hardy Weinberg Equilibrium P value, and whether the alcohol questionnaire used was beverage specific (fig S4 of appendix), or after exclusion of samples with a proportion of A-allele carriers >10% (approximately >5% minor allele frequency; data available on request). A meta-regression analysis of the mean alcohol volume (on the log scale) in rs1229984 A-allele carriers compared with non-carriers that takes into account the uncertainty around the mean suggested a constant proportional effect of the of ADH1B rs1229984 variant on alcohol volume (fig S5). This was also supported by the finding that in our samples the standard deviations for carriers and non-carriers were very similar (fig S6).

ADH1B and cardiovascular biomarkers

Carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele had lower systolic blood pressure (−0.88 (−1.19 to −0.56) mm Hg) compared with non-carriers. Concordant with this, rs1229984 A-allele carriers also had lower odds of hypertension (104,570 cases; odds ratio 0.94 (0.91 to 0.98)). Rs1229984 A-allele carriers had lower levels of interleukin-6 (−5.2% (−7.8% to −2.4%)), C reactive protein (−3.4% (−5.7% to −1.1%)), body mass index (−0.17 (−0.24 to −0.10) kg/m²), and waist circumference (−0.34 (−0.58 to −0.10) cm). Rs1229984 A-allele carriers also had lower non-HDL cholesterol concentrations (−0.03 (−0.05 to −0.01) mmol/L) (table 2). When the effect of the ADH1B rs1229984 A-allele on these cardiovascular traits was stratified by alcohol consumption, a differential effect was observed. Among heavy drinkers (≥21 units/week), carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele, who on average consume 17.2% less alcohol than non-carriers, showed a more pronounced reduction in these cardiovascular traits than that observed in light to moderate drinkers and non-drinkers (fig 1). In contrast, the effect of rs1229984 on these cardiovascular traits did not differ systematically according to exploratory subgroup analyses by laboratory procedures or study characteristics (P>0.05 for 52 of 58 comparisons; fig S7 of appendix).

Although we observed that rs1229984 A-allele carriers had higher triglyceride levels (1.6% (0.7% to 2.6%)), this effect was not modified by alcohol categories (fig 1). There was no overall difference between rs1229984 A-allele carriers and non-carriers in HDL cholesterol concentration (−0.004 (−0.012 to 0.003) mmol/L). However, an association between rs1229984 A-allele carriage with HDL cholesterol was observed in the highest category of alcohol consumption, but in the opposite direction to that expected from observational findings (0.04 (0.02 to 0.06) mmol/L; fig S8 of appendix). (That is, the log-linear association of HDL cholesterol with alcohol consumption from observational studies (fig S3) would suggest that a reduction in alcohol consumption, as observed for carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele, should associate with a reduction in HDL cholesterol levels.) In subgroup analysis by laboratory procedures and major study characteristics, we observed that rs1229984 A-allele carriers from northern Europe had lower levels of HDL cholesterol (−0.04 (−0.05 to −0.02) mmol/L). Since this geographical specificity could reflect residual population stratification in samples outside northern Europe, we adjusted for principal components in a subset of individuals not from northern Europe. The unadjusted model for the association between rs1229984 A-allele and HDL cholesterol (0.02 difference in standard deviation (95% confidence interval −0.02 to 0.06)) did not differ from the model adjusted for population structure (0.01 difference in standard deviation
outcomes were similar to those from fixed effect models (fig S9 of appendix). No association between rs1229984 A-allele with ischaemic stroke (odds ratio 0.83 (0.72 to 0.95)) (fig S13 of appendix). The gene variant was not in linkage disequilibrium with previously reported loci from genome-wide association studies for any cardiovascular trait (table S11).

Discussion

Principal findings of study

In this large scale Mendelian randomisation analysis, we showed that carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele had lower levels of alcohol consumption and exhibited lower levels of blood pressure, inflammatory biomarkers, adiposity measures, and non-HDL cholesterol, and reduced odds of developing coronary heart disease, compared with non-carriers of this allele. In contrast to previous observational and experimental studies, our study showed that individuals with a genetic predisposition to consume less alcohol had lower, not higher, odds of developing coronary heart disease regardless of whether they were light, moderate, or heavy drinkers. Moreover, ADH1B genotype was not associated with type 2 diabetes, HDL cholesterol level, or coagulation markers.

The rs1229984 A-allele showed very strong association with non-drinking and amount of alcohol consumed. The fact that our analyses suggested a constant proportional effect of the rs1229984 A-allele on alcohol volume across a wide range of alcohol volume from the included studies supports the notion that social pressure in heavier drinking cultures is unlikely to override the effect of the genetic variant on alcohol consumption.\textsuperscript{20} It is important to note that the rs1229984 A-allele was a proxy for all types of self reported drinking behaviour including volume, being in the top third of drinkers per study, binge drinking, and abstinence, and it also showed association with levels of the liver enzyme γ-glutamyltransferase (an objective marker of heavy alcohol intake). This confirms that rs1229984 was suitable as a non-specific genetic proxy of alcohol consumption in the mendelian randomisation analysis. Our findings are therefore not specific to one particular type of alcohol behaviour, but reflect a combination of different patterns of alcohol exposures, which are nevertheless directionally concordant (that is, the A-allele resulted in lower alcohol consumption).

For the cardiovascular traits that showed association on overall with the rs1229984 A-allele, null or substantially reduced associations were observed in non-drinkers and more pronounced associations in heavy drinkers when compared with light to moderate drinkers. This is as expected under the assumption that the effect of this genetic variant is only explained by exposure to alcohol.

From the U shaped association seen in observational studies, we would expect that for drinkers below the nadir (12-25 units/week), a reduction of 17.2\% in alcohol consumption (corresponding to rs1229984 A-allele carriage) would lead to a small increase in the risk of coronary heart disease, whereas for those with alcohol consumption above the nadir, a similar reduction in alcohol consumption would lead to a decrease in coronary heart disease risk. Contrary to these expectations, however, we found that individuals below the nadir with a genetic predisposition to consume less alcohol had lower odds of developing coronary heart disease at all categories of alcohol consumption (fig 2), bringing the hypothesised cardioprotective effect of alcohol into question.

ADH1B and lifestyle factors

Carriage of the rs1229984 A-allele was not associated with physical activity, but showed higher odds of early smoking (odds ratio 1.06 (95\% confidence interval 1.02 to 1.09)). However, the association with ever smoking was in the opposite direction to that seen in observational analysis, and no association was observed for other quantitative measures of tobacco exposure such as cigarettes per day, pack years, or cotinine levels. Rs1229984 A-allele carriers showed higher total years in education (0.04 difference in standard deviation (95\% confidence interval 0.01 to 0.08)). No differential effect of ADH1B on any of the lifestyle factors was identified on stratifying by alcohol intake (making it unlikely that stratifying by alcohol introduced bias) or by other exploratory subgroups (P>0.05 for all comparisons) (figs S10 and S11 of appendix).

ADH1B and cardiovascular events

Rs1229984 A-allele carriage showed reduced odds of coronary heart disease (odds ratio 0.90 (95\% confidence interval 0.84 to 0.96, I\(^2\)=17\%)) (fig 2 and fig S12 of appendix). In studies with \(\geq 1000\) coronary heart disease events (four studies with 8374 coronary heart disease events), the odds ratio for coronary heart disease was 0.81 (0.72 to 0.91, I\(^2\)=50\%) (table S10). When analysis was restricted to non-drinkers the association was null (odds ratio 0.98 (0.88 to 1.10)), while among drinkers (>0 units/week alcohol), carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele had reduced odds of coronary heart disease (odds ratio 0.86 (0.78 to 0.94)). This is consistent with the assumption that the associations ascribed to the ADH1B variant are mainly due to alcohol consumption. Further subdivision of the drinkers category into light (>0 to <7 units/week), moderate (>7 to <21 units/week), and heavy (>21 units/week) showed the same protective effect of the variant across all alcohol categories (P value for heterogeneity=0.83; fig 2), suggesting that there was no difference between rs1229984 A-allele carriers and non-carriers in coronary heart disease risk across alcohol consumption levels among individuals who drank.

Although there was no association of the rs1229984 A-allele with the combined stroke subtypes (odds ratio 0.98 (0.90 to 1.07)) (fig 3), when the analysis was limited to ischaemic stroke subtype, rs1229984 A-allele carriers had lower odds of ischaemic stroke (odds ratio 0.83 (0.72 to 0.95)) (fig S13 of appendix). No association between rs1229984 A-allele with type2 diabetes was observed (odds ratio 1.02 (0.95 to 1.09)) (fig 3).

Random effect estimates for associations of ADH1B with all outcomes were similar to those from fixed effect models (figs S4-14 of appendix).
Strengths and weaknesses of the study

Major strengths of this international collaboration are the large sample size, availability of detailed alcohol phenotypic data and a comprehensive repertoire of cardiovascular risk factors and major cardiovascular events. The process by which studies were recruited into the collaboration, including mainly unpublished data, means that findings are unlikely to suffer from publication bias. The use of a standardised analytical protocol further increases reliability of the findings.

The lack of association of the ADH1B rs1229984 A-allele with HDL cholesterol levels was unexpected. In principle, failure to detect an association with HDL cholesterol could have arisen from lack of power. However, this is unlikely as rs1229984 was associated with traits (such as C reactive protein or interleukin 6) for which alcohol consumption had a less powerful effect and where the sample size for genetic analysis was several times smaller than for HDL cholesterol (fig S2 of appendix). Our extensive subgroup and in silico analyses also suggested it was unlikely that laboratory technique, type of alcohol questionnaire used in the studies, or confounding by linkage disequilibrium could explain the overall null effect. We did find an association of rs1229984 A-allele carriage with HDL cholesterol in the subset of northern European studies. Although this suggests the lack of association in non-northern European studies may arise from population stratification, adjustment for population structure using principal components analysis did not reveal an association, making this an unlikely explanation.

We also did not identify associations of the rs1229984 A-allele with coagulation markers, type 2 diabetes, and the combined subtypes of stroke. With regard to coagulation markers, these results seem more robust for fibrinogen, as confirmed by subgroup analysis. For factor VII and von Willebrand factor, reduced sample size limited our ability to exclude a small effect.

Although we observed an overall null association of the rs1229984 A-allele with type 2 diabetes and blood glucose concentration, a stratified analysis by alcohol consumption showed that, among heavy drinkers, carriers of the rs1229984 A-allele had lower levels of glucose and a directionally consistent relationship with type 2 diabetes. It is interesting that we did not observe a stronger protective association of coronary heart disease in heavy drinkers for carriers of the ADH1B variant, as we observed for cardiovascular risk factors. This is likely to reflect reduced power due to the low number of coronary heart disease events in the heavy drinking stratum.

The relatively small number of stroke events is an important limitation, as well as the use of combined stroke subtypes, which could have obscured some differential associations of alcohol by pathological or aetiological subtype, as suggested by recent overviews from observational studies.7 In this context it is interesting to note than in a subset of studies, we found the rs1229984 A-allele associated with reduced odds of ischaemic stroke, but this requires replication.

One of the advantages of a mendelian randomisation study is that this design is less prone to some of the biases of observational studies. In contrast to observational analyses that have shown associations of alcohol with physical activity and different measures of smoking,21 22 rs1229984 A-allele was not associated with physical activity or any of the more precise measures of smoking exposure (cigarettes/day, pack years, or cotinine level). However, an association was observed with the binary ever/never smoking trait, but this was in the opposite direction to the association with coronary heart disease and is therefore unlikely to explain the association of rs1229984 A-allele with a reduced risk of coronary heart disease. There was also some evidence for a difference in years of education, and, while the size of the effect was small, this requires further investigation.

Strengths and weaknesses in relation to other studies

Our findings compare with findings from studies in east Asians, using the rs671 genetic variant of the aldehyde dehydrogenase 2 gene (ALDH2), that have also shown associations of alcohol with blood pressure, body mass index, and non-HDL cholesterol levels.21 22 However, the association with coronary heart disease events remains unclear since the association of ALDH2 with coronary heart disease has been analysed only in small studies.21 22 In contrast to our findings, ALDH2 rs671 has shown an association with HDL cholesterol levels in individuals of Asian ancestry.23 In Europeans the ALDH2 rs671 variant is monomorphic and cannot be used for mendelian randomisation, and previous studies have therefore used the ADH1B genotype to investigate the effect of alcohol on cardiovascular disease.20 24

Our results not only replicate findings of ADH1B on blood pressure and body mass index from smaller data collections, but expand the number of cardiovascular traits and include major vascular events. Given our large sample size, we are able to identify associations with other cardiovascular traits (non-HDL cholesterol, interleukin 6, and C reactive protein), and most notably we are able to detect for the first time an association with coronary heart disease.

One feature in common to both ALDH2 and ADH1B for mendelian randomisation is the use of genetic variants within loci that encode alcohol metabolising enzymes. In both examples, genetic variation results in altered exposure to acetaldehyde, a metabolite of alcohol that causes unpleasant symptoms, thought to be responsible for the different drinking behaviour in individuals who possess the alleles.24 Thus, a simple interpretation of a mendelian randomisation analysis using a genetic variant in an alcohol metabolising enzyme is that it is akin to a long term randomised trial of more versus less alcohol exposure.

Meaning of the study: possible explanations for clinicians and policymakers and other researchers; how your study could promote better decisions

These data show that individuals of European descent with a genetic predisposition to consume less alcohol had a reduced risk of coronary heart disease and ischaemic stroke, and lower levels of several established and emerging risk factors for cardiovascular disease. These findings suggest that reductions of alcohol consumption, even for light to moderate drinkers, may be beneficial for cardiovascular health. Our results therefore challenge the concept of a cardioprotective effect associated with light to moderate alcohol consumption reported in observational studies and suggest that this effect may have been due to residual confounding or selection bias.

Unanswered questions and future research

Although the association of the ADH1B variant with coronary heart disease is compatible with being null in non-drinkers and a more pronounced association is seen in drinkers, future access to large scale population studies such as UK Biobank and China Kadoorie Biobank Study will help to minimise potential measurement error in alcohol exposure and provide sufficiently large numbers of coronary heart disease events to enable replication of our findings, in particular the analysis stratified...
by alcohol status, but will also allow a more detailed examination of stroke subtypes.

Members of the InterAct Consortium and IMPROVE study group are listed in the supplementary appendix.

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What is already known on this topic

Observational studies suggest that consuming alcohol in heavy amounts is deleterious for cardiovascular health, whereas light to moderate consumption may be protective. However, findings for light to moderate drinkers could be due to unaccounted bias.

What this study adds

Use of a genetic approach in an analysis of over 260,000 participants showed that carriers of a variant in the alcohol dehydrogenase 1B gene (ADH1B) associated with less alcohol consumption were found to have a reduced risk of coronary heart disease, and this was maintained at all levels of alcohol consumption. Under the principles of mendelian randomisation, these findings suggest that reduction of alcohol consumption, even for light to moderate drinkers, is beneficial for cardiovascular health.

of researchers based at the National Centre for Social Research, University College London and the Institute of Fiscal Studies. The data were collected by the National Centre for Social Research.; **EPIC InterAct:** We thank all EPIC participants and staff for their contribution to the study. We thank staff from the Technical, Field Epidemiology and Data Functional Group Teams of the MRC Epidemiology Unit in Cambridge, UK, for carrying out sample preparation, DNA provision and quality control, genotyping and data-handling work. The InterAct study received funding from the European Union (Integrated Project LSHM-CT-2006-037197 in the Framework Programme 6 of the European Community); **EPIC Netherlands:** We thank Statistics Netherlands and Netherlands Cancer Registry (NKr) for follow-up data on cancer, cardiovascular disease, vital status and causes of death. Supported by the European Commission: Public Health and Consumer Protection Directorate 1993-2004; Research Directorate-General 2005; Dutch Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports; Netherlands Cancer Registry; LR Research Funds; Dutch Prevention Funds; Dutch Zorg Onderzoek Nederland; and World Cancer Research Fund (The Netherlands) (to the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition-Netherlands study). The EPIC-NL study was funded by ‘Europe against Cancer’ Programme of the European Commission (SANCO), Dutch Ministry of Public Health, Welfare and Sports (VWS), Netherlands Cancer Registry (NKr), LR Research Funds, Dutch Prevention Funds, Dutch Cancer Society; ZonMW the Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development, World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) (The Netherlands). 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JS and AFHP were supported by German Research Federal Ministry (BMBF), JS was supported by a Heisenberg-Professorship (SP716/1-1) and clinical research groups of the German Research Foundation (DFG; KFO192/1 and 218/1), JS, AFHP and MM were also supported by a graduate school of the DFG (GK1208); **EPIC Turin:** The EPIC Turin study is funded by grants from the Associazione Italiana per le Ricerche sul Cancro, Italy and grants from the Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin, Italy; **FHS:** The Framingham Heart Study began in 1948 with the recruitment of an original cohort of 5,209 men and women (mean age 44 years; 55 percent women). In 1971 a second generation of study participants was enrolled; this cohort consisted of 5,124 children and spouses of children of the original cohort. The mean age of the offspring cohort was 37 years; 52 percent were women. A third generation cohort of 4,095 children of offspring cohort participants (mean age 40 years; 53 percent women) was enrolled beginning in 2002. At each clinic visit, a medical history was obtained with a focus on cardiovascular content, and participants underwent a physical examination including measurement of height and weight from which BMI was calculated; **HAPIEE:** This study was supported by Wellcome Trust ‘Determinants of Cardiovascular Diseases in Eastern Europe: A multi-centre cohort study’ [grants 064947/Z/01/Z; and 081081/Z/02/Z]; the MacArthur Foundation MacArthur Initiative on Social Upheaval and Health’ [grant 712058]; the National Institute on Ageing ‘Health disparities and aging in societies in transition (the HAPIEE study)’ [grant 1R01 AG23522]; and a project from the Ministry of Health, Czech Republic, for the development of the research organization No. 00023001 (IKEM, Prague, Czech Republic). 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This study was supported by research grants HL35464, CA50775, CA87969, AA11181, and HL34594 from the National Institute of Health, Bethesda; **IMPROVE:** This study was supported by the European Commission (Contract number: QLQ1- CT- 2002- 00896), Ministero della Salute Ricerca Corrente, Italy, the Swedish Heart-Lung Foundation, the Swedish Research Council (projects 8691 and 0593), the Foundation for Strategic Research, the Stockholm County Council (project 562183), the Foundation for Strategic Research, the Academy of Finland (Grant #110413) and the British Heart Foundation (RG2008/014). None of the aforementioned funding organizations or sponsors has had a specific role in design or conduct of the study, collection, management, analysis, or interpretation of the data, or preparation, review, or approval of the manuscript.; **Inter99:** The Inter99 study was supported by the Danish Medical Research Council, the Danish Centre for Evaluation and Health Technology Assessment, Copenhagen County, the Danish Heart Foundation, the Danish Pharmaceutical Association, the Health Insurance Foundation, the Augustinus Foundation, the Ib Henriksens foundation and the Beckett Foundation. The present study was further supported by the Danish Diabetes Association (grant No. 32. 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Genotyping was supported by the British Heart Foundation (grant number CH/98001 to A.F.D., RG/07/005/23633 to A.F.D., S.P.); **MESA:** The Multi-Ethnic Study of Atherosclerosis Study (MESA) is a multicenter prospective cohort study initiated to study the
development of subclinical cardiovascular disease. A total of 6814 women and men between the age of 45 and 84 year were recruited for the first examination between 2000 and 2002. Participants were recruited in six US cities (Baltimore, MD; Chicago, IL; Forsyth County, NC; Los Angeles County, CA; Northern Manhattan, NY; and St. Paul, MN). This study was approved by the institutional review boards of each study site, and written informed consent was obtained from all participants. This cohort was genotyped as part of the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute’s (NHLBI) Candidate Gene Association Resource (CARE) (Musunuru, K., Lettre, G., Young, T., Farlow, D.N., Pirruccello, J.P., Ejebu, K.G., Keating, B.J., Yang, Q., Chen, M.H., Lapchyk, N. et al. Candidate gene association resource (CARE): design, methods, and proof of concept. Circ. Cardiovasc. Genet. 3, 267-275.). MRC 1958BC: Dr Sue Ring and Dr Wendy McArdle (University of Bristol) and Mr Jon Johnson (Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Institute of Education, London) are thanked for help with data linkage. The study was supported by the Academy of Finland (12926) and the Medical Research Council (MRC G0601653 and SALVE/PredMedysn). The Medical Research Council funded the 2002-2004 clinical follow-up of the 1958 birth cohort (grant G0000934). This research used resources provided by the Type 1 Diabetes Genetics Consortium, a collaborative clinical study sponsored by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Human Genome Research Institute, National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International (JDRF) and supported by U01 DK062418. This study makes use of data generated by the Wellcome Trust Case-Control Consortium. A full list of investigators who contributed to generation of the data is available from the Wellcome Trust Case-Control Consortium website (www.wtccc.org.uk). Funding for the project was provided by the Wellcome Trust under award 076113. Work at the Centre for Paediatric Epidemiology and Biostatistics benefits from funding support from the MRC in its capacity as the MRC Centre of Epidemiology for Child Health. Research at the University College London Institute of Child Health and Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust benefits from R&D funding received from the NHS Executive; MRC NHSHD: Supported by Medical Research Council – MC_UU_12019/1. We are very grateful to the members of this birth cohort for their continuing interest and participation in the study. 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Professor Kjeldsen is also an investigator of the ASCOT trial; NHPS II: NHPS-II was supported by the British Medical Research Council, the US National Institutes of Health (grant NHLBI 33014), and Du Pont Pharma, Wilmington, Delaware; Portuguese stroke: Instituto Nacional de Saude Doutor Ricardo Jorge; PREVEND: PREVEND genetics is supported by the Dutch Kidney Foundation (Grant E033). 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A listing of WHI investigators can be found at https://cleo.whi.org/researchers/Documents%20%20Write%20a%20Paper/WHI%20Investigator%20Short%20List.pdf. Statement of independence from funders: All researchers acted independently of study funders. The study funders played no role in study design and the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data and the writing of the article and the decision to submit it for publication. None of the funders influenced the data analysis or interpretation of results. The comments made in this paper are those of the authors and not necessarily those of any funders. Competing interests: All authors have completed the ICMJE uniform disclosure form at www.icmje.org/coi_disclosure.pdf and declare: Prof
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Data sharing statement: No additional data available

Transparency declaration: No additional data available

3 Freiberg MS, Samet JH. Alcohol and coronary heart disease: the answer awaits a randomized controlled trial. Circulation 2005;112:1379-81.
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### Tables

**Table 1**  Pooled estimates of association between genetic variant ADH1B rs1229984 (A-allele carriers v non-carriers) and measures of alcohol consumption. (Summary effect estimates are derived from fixed effects meta-analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alcohol consumption measure</th>
<th>No of studies, cases/individuals</th>
<th>Effect estimate (95% CI)</th>
<th>P value</th>
<th>P value (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Log transformed data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intake volume (units/week†)</td>
<td>46, NA/218 969</td>
<td>−17.22 (−18.86 to −15.55)</td>
<td>5.5×10⁻⁶</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>γ-glutamyltransferase level (U/L)</td>
<td>15, NA/97 755</td>
<td>−1.84 (−3.40 to −0.26)</td>
<td>0.028</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Categorical data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top tertile of alcohol intake</td>
<td>45, 69 229/222 332</td>
<td>0.70 (0.68 to 0.73)</td>
<td>9.8×10⁻⁴</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binge drinker‡</td>
<td>21, 22 198/131 290</td>
<td>0.78 (0.73 to 0.84)</td>
<td>1.4×10⁻⁵</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol abstainer‡</td>
<td>32, 24 482/189 854</td>
<td>1.27 (1.21 to 1.34)</td>
<td>2.6×10⁻⁵</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NA = not applicable.

*Non-normally distributed variables were natural log transformed and mean differences on the log scale were converted to percentage differences.
†Alcohol units in British units; 1 UK unit = 0.57 US units or 10 mL (7.9 g) ethanol.
‡For definitions of binge drinker and alcohol abstainer, see table S2 in appendix.
Table 2 | Pooled estimates of association between genetic variant ADH1B rs1229984 (A-allele carriers v non-carriers) and cardiovascular biomarkers in all participants. (Summary effect estimates are derived from fixed effects meta-analysis and are reported as mean differences unless stated otherwise)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biomarker</th>
<th>No of studies, individuals</th>
<th>Effect estimate (95% CI)</th>
<th>P value</th>
<th>I² value (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systolic blood pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>48, 227 559</td>
<td>−0.88 (−1.19 to −0.56)</td>
<td>4.1×10⁻⁸</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropometric measures:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body mass index (weight (kg)/(height (m)²))</td>
<td>51, 232 570</td>
<td>−0.17 (−0.24 to −0.10)</td>
<td>3.4×10⁻⁸</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waist circumference (cm)</td>
<td>42, 140 923</td>
<td>−0.34 (−0.58 to −0.10)</td>
<td>6.2×10⁻⁸</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflammation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log transformed interleukin 6 (% difference)*</td>
<td>17, 30 950</td>
<td>−5.15 (−7.82 to −2.40)</td>
<td>2.9×10⁻¹</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log transformed C reactive protein (% difference)*</td>
<td>42, 124 498</td>
<td>−3.40 (−5.68 to −1.05)</td>
<td>4.6×10⁻³</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lipids:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-HDL cholesterol (mmol/L)</td>
<td>46, 202 794</td>
<td>−0.03 (−0.05 to −0.01)</td>
<td>5.1×10⁻⁸</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log transformed triglycerides (% difference)*</td>
<td>46, 205 824</td>
<td>1.61 (0.66 to 2.57)</td>
<td>8.9×10⁻⁴</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDL cholesterol (mmol/L)</td>
<td>46, 203 440</td>
<td>−0.004 (−0.012 to 0.003)</td>
<td>0.259</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-normally distributed variables were natural log transformed and mean differences on the log scale were converted to percentage differences.
Fig 1 Meta-analysis pooled estimates of the association between ADH1B rs1229984 (A-allele carriers v non-carriers) and cardiovascular disease biomarkers showing association on crude analysis, stratified by alcohol intake.
### Fig 2 Meta-analysis pooled estimates of the association between ADH1B rs1229984 (A-allele carriers v non-carriers) and coronary heart disease overall, and stratified by alcohol intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category for coronary heart disease outcome</th>
<th>No of studies</th>
<th>No of cases/individuals</th>
<th>Odds ratio (95% CI)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall (all individuals)</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20 259/168 731</td>
<td>0.90 (0.84 to 0.96)</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any or no alcohol intake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-drinkers</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5883/43 029</td>
<td>0.98 (0.88 to 1.10)</td>
<td>0.095*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinkers only</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10 130/107 478</td>
<td>0.86 (0.78 to 0.94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinkers subgroup (units/week)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light (0 to 7)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4686/47 246</td>
<td>0.90 (0.79 to 1.02)</td>
<td>0.828*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate (7 to 21)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3222/33 772</td>
<td>0.89 (0.75 to 1.06)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heavy (≥21)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1919/16 225</td>
<td>0.97 (0.76 to 1.24)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P value for heterogeneity obtained from test for trend using meta-regression.

### Fig 3 Meta-analysis pooled estimates of the association between ADH1B rs1229984 (A-allele carriers v non-carriers) and stroke (combined subtypes) and type 2 diabetes overall, and stratified by alcohol intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category for outcomes</th>
<th>No of studies</th>
<th>No of cases/individuals</th>
<th>Odds ratio (95% CI)</th>
<th>P value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stroke</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (all individuals)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10 164/145 063</td>
<td>0.98 (0.90 to 1.07)</td>
<td>0.683</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any or no alcohol intake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-drinkers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3626/38 575</td>
<td>1.12 (0.98 to 1.28)</td>
<td>0.139*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinkers only</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4882/93 089</td>
<td>0.95 (0.83 to 1.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (all individuals)</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>14 549/178 388</td>
<td>1.02 (0.95 to 1.09)</td>
<td>0.627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any or no alcohol intake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-drinkers</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5165/45 856</td>
<td>1.09 (0.98 to 1.21)</td>
<td>0.119*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinkers only</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5299/111 140</td>
<td>0.97 (0.86 to 1.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* P value for heterogeneity obtained from test for trend using meta-regression.