

# Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide

Victor Grech

“Never go to excess, but let moderation be your guide” is a quote from Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC) who was a Roman statesman, orator, lawyer and philosopher. His statement is corroborated by medical science in that two recent studies have vividly demonstrated the wages of sin/excess.

A Lancet study has shown that even light-to-moderate drinking may cause hypertension, and thereby increase the chance of stroke. This was demonstrated in a genetic study that followed 500,000 Chinese for 10 years. However the findings are applicable to all populations and constitute the best extant evidence on the effects of alcohol. In summary:

- One to two units daily increased stroke risk by 10-15%.
- Four units daily increased stroke risk by 35%.

The study failed to uncover evidence of a protective effect/s by light or moderate drinking. It appears that risk of stroke increases proportionally with the total amount of alcohol consumed.<sup>1</sup>

Yet another Lancet paper showed that poor diets have also been linked to 20% of all deaths worldwide. The review analyzed nearly 20 years of dietary data from 195 countries and estimated that poor diets killed 11 million people prematurely around the world in 2017, mostly by predisposing to cardiovascular disease and cancer. A poor diet has been described as an equal-opportunity killer. The solution is to eat less and to consume healthier options.

The excessive consumption of sodium (and the ensuing hypertension and cardiovascular morbidity) was found to be the highest contributor of diet-related death. Overall, the main problem appeared to be the low intake of healthy food (such as whole grains, nuts and seeds, fruits, vegetables, polyunsaturated fats and legumes) rather than excessive consumption of unhealthy food.<sup>2</sup>

Our patients, who depend on us for advice, should be soberly apprised with regard to these and other medical lifestyle studies.

## References

1. Millwood IY, Walters RG, Mei XW, Guo Y, Yang L, Bian Z, Bennett DA, Chen Y, Dong C, Hu R, Zhou G. Conventional and genetic evidence on alcohol and vascular disease aetiology: a prospective study of 500 000 men and women in China. *The Lancet*. 2019;393(10183):1831-42.
2. Afshin A, Sur PJ, Fay KA, Cornaby L, Ferrara G, Salama JS, Mullany EC, Abate KH, Abbafati C, Abebe Z, Afarideh M et. Al.. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *Lancet*. 2019 May 11;393(10184):1958-1972

**Victor Grech** PhD (London), PhD (Malta), FRCPCH, FRCP(UK), DCH  
Department of Paediatrics  
Mater Dei Hospital  
Msida  
victor.e.grech@gov.mt

**Cover Picture:**  
‘Choosing Hope’  
*Acrylic on canvas*  
By Michael Farrugia

A Maltese Canadian management consultant with international experience. A wannabe artist who uses painting as a relaxation medium