

A Third of Europeans are Teetotal

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An international GfK survey looks at alcohol consumption in 17 countries
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Europeans drink alcohol with varying frequency, depending on their country of origin. Most people in Turkey, for example, are teetotal. In Germany, this applies to only 18% of residents. The European average shows that around one third shun alcohol while the number of teetotalers is slightly higher in the USA. These are the findings of a survey on alcohol consumption, carried out in 16 European countries and the USA by GfK Custom Research on behalf of The Wall Street Journal Europe.

Four out of ten Americans indicated that they never drink alcohol. In Europe, this applies to three in ten respondents. The majority in Turkey expressed that they are teetotal. More than 80% do not drink alcohol at all. Approximately 50% of Italians and Portuguese do not drink any alcohol. By contrast, with 18% of the population stating that they are teetotal, Germany is ranked further down the league table. The number of non-drinkers is even lower in the Netherlands (15%), Greece and Sweden (14% in each case).

Approximately 40% of Europeans drink alcohol a maximum of once a week. In Germany, this figure totals almost 50%. The percentage of Europeans who have several drinks a week amounts to 16%. Ten percent indicated that they have one or more alcoholic drinks a day. At 9%, Germany is just below this average value. The group of people who consume alcohol on a daily basis comprises mainly men aged 50 or over.

A matter of taste

Choice being a matter of taste also applies to people selecting their favorite alcoholic drinks. Western Europeans for example prefer wine and sparkling wine to anything else. A total of 43% of respondents stated that these were their favorite drinks. In second place is beer with 34%. Differentiated by gender, it emerges that the majority of western European women prefer wine and wine-based drinks in particular. Almost half of men prefer to drink beer. In the wine-growing countries of Italy and Switzerland, wine is popular with an above-average number of residents. Almost two thirds favor wine over other alcoholic drinks. In France and Belgium, half of respondents also prefer wine and sparkling wine. However, 50% of Spanish respondents stated that they like beer, with only a quarter indicating wine as their favorite drink. Unsurprisingly, the result for Germany shows that around half of Germans prefer beer while approximately 40% like wine better.

Spirits big in Russia while Turkey has a sweet tooth

Only 10% of Europeans and Americans indicated spirits such as whiskey, gin and vodka as their favorite drinks. By comparison, these types of alcoholic drinks are extremely popular in Russia. A total of 30% of respondents there are most likely to drink spirits with high alcohol content. This means that in Russia vodka is as popular as wine and almost as popular as beer.

Sweet and mixed alcoholic drinks are well-liked in the USA and Turkey. Approximately one in five respondents in these countries opts for sweet alcoholic drinks, such as cocktails and alcopops. There are differences between men and women in terms of preferences. While men aged 50+ are most likely to choose a mixed drink in Turkey, in the USA these drinks are favored by girls and young women aged 14 to 29. In the rest of Europe, an average of only 7% of respondents has a preference for such drinks.

Liqueurs and fortified wines are the least popular drinks. In Europe and in the USA, they are far down the preference ranking with a value of around 5%. The French make an exception, with a total of 12% of respondents being liqueur aficionados. These kinds of drinks are particularly popular with women in the 50+ age group.

Alcohol and its effects

In response to the question as to how alcohol impacts on their mood, 30% Europeans and a quarter of US respondents replied that they felt no effect at all. Only one out of seven Americans stated that alcohol made them feel funny. This applies for a quarter of Europeans. The corresponding figure for Germany is well above average, with a total of 41% expressing that they feel funny under the influence of alcohol.

Around one out of four American respondents believes that alcohol makes people friendlier. In Europe, only one in six respondents agreed with this statement. Hardly any respondents expected alcohol to have a positive effect on their sensuality. Only 3% of all respondents feel amorous when they have been drinking. By contrast, one out of ten Europeans and one in six Americans feel tired after consuming alcohol.

The statements made about the negative effects of alcohol consumption are noteworthy. Almost three out of ten Europeans indicated that they only start to feel a negative physical or mental effect after drinking five units of alcohol, which corresponds to five glasses of beer, schnapps or wine. Two in ten assume that three units are sufficient to make them feel worse and 12% stated that they feel a negative physical or mental impact after two glasses.

The survey

In autumn 2008, GfK Custom Research surveyed a total of 17,343 respondents aged 14 or over in 17 countries on behalf of The Wall Street Journal Europe and with financial support from GfK-Nürnberg e.V. for the international "Alcohol consumption" study. Key aspects examined include alcohol consumption, preferences and drinking habits as well as the physical and psychological effects of alcohol consumption.

The Wall Street Journal Europe (www.wsj.com)

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