

Drinking can be dangerous

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People who drink alcohol are up to four times more likely than non-drinkers to be hurt from physical injuries such as a fall or punch, new research shows. The University of Queensland study found any alcohol consumption quadrupled the risk of injury for the first six hours after drinking alcohol and this risk remained at 2.5 times that of a non drinker for the next 24 hours.

Quantity and specific drinks such as beer or spirits did not increase injury risk but mixing drinks increased injury risk five-fold.

Binge drinkers were more at risk of being injured than regular drinkers.

And people who sustained serious injuries were more likely to have consumed beer and have been drinking in a licensed premises.

Dr Kerrianne Watt, who studied for her PhD with UQ's School of Population Health, said her results might seem obvious but there had been few studies about drinking and all injuries, not just those from car crashes.

And these previous studies had not taken into account other possible explanations for injury such as drug use and risk-taking behaviour.

Dr Watt's results came from interviewing about 500 people who were admitted into the Gold Coast Hospital Emergency Department between October 2000 and October 2001.

Patients, aged 16 years and above, were asked about their injuries which varied from head injuries, falls, assaults, cuts, piercings, choking, burns and near drownings.

They were asked how they were injured, where they were injured and the severity.

The most common injuries were falls, being hit by or against something and car and motorbike crashes.

The highest blood alcohol reading was .31%.

“Car crashes are important and we need to continue to care about those,” Dr Watt said.

“But this research indicates that drinking alcohol increases all types of injury, not just car crashes.

“There are a whole variety of other alcohol-related injuries that we need to worry about and take notice of.

“We have been conditioned to think I'm drinking but not driving, I'm fine, I don't need to worry about anything, but that's not necessarily true.”

Some venues have banned serving some drinks such as rum because of a perception that it makes drinkers aggressive.

“My findings suggest that it's not a property of the beverage that increases aggression and risk of injury, it's more a personality characteristic that is attracted to a certain type of alcohol,” Dr Watt said.

“We have anecdotally seen that some beverages, for instance spirits,

result in increased risk of injury.

“But we haven't known whether it's because people who drink spirits drink more alcohol, because they have a particular personality type or because they engage in more risky behaviour.”

Source: University of Queensland

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