

'Extreme' college drinking and a sensation-seeking disposition lead to injury

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Drinking on college campuses in the United States is a pervasive problem, leading to numerous problems. One study estimated that more than 500,000 college students suffered alcohol-related injuries in 2001. This study examined the "dose-response" effect of quantities and frequencies, finding that heavy drinkers with a sensation-seeking disposition had the greatest risk of alcohol-related injuries.

Results will be published in the September issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* and are currently available at Early View.

"In the United States, most - as in 70 percent - of college students have consumed [alcohol](#) in the past 30 days, and 40 percent of students have engaged in heavy [drinking](#) in the past two weeks," said Marlon P. Mundt, assistant scientist in the department of Family Medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and corresponding author for the study.

"More than 1,700 U.S. college students aged 18-24 died from alcohol-related injuries in 2001," he added. "Approximately 2.8 million U.S. college students drove under the influence of [alcohol](#) in the past 12 months, and 600,000 U.S. college students were hit or assaulted by a student who was under the influence of alcohol."

While previous studies have looked at the connection between average college alcohol consumption and physical injury, or at the relationship between frequency of binge drinking (defined as 5+ drinks for males/4+ drinks for females) and injury, he explained, this study examined the

combined "dose-response" effects of drinking quantities and frequencies on college alcohol-related injury risk.

Mundt and his colleagues initially surveyed 12,900 [college students](#) seeking routine care in five college health clinics on alcohol use and other health risk behaviors. Of these, 2,090 who exceeded at-risk levels of alcohol consumption agreed to participate in face-to-face interviews to determine eligibility for a randomized controlled trial of brief alcohol-intervention. The interview assessed previous 28-day alcohol use, as well as alcohol-related injuries in the preceding six months.

"Compounding the risk of multiple days of heavy drinking, students who drank 8+ drinks for males or 5+ drinks for females on at least four days per month, for example, every weekend, were five times more likely to be injured than those who did not frequently cross the 8+ M/5+ F drinking limit," said Mundt. "In addition, students who scored high on sensation-seeking disposition also experienced greater risk for alcohol-related injuries."

He added that prior research had shown that a sensation-seeking disposition is linked to alcohol-related injuries treated at hospital emergency rooms, and also linked to alcohol-impaired driving.

"College administrators, parents, and clinicians need to focus their intervention efforts on these students - 'frequent extreme heavy drinkers' - who score high on sensation-seeking disposition," said Mundt. "These are the students at high risk for injury. Quantities alone, or frequency of consumption alone, do not show the whole picture. A drinking pattern of frequent extreme intoxication is key, as it escalates injury rates rapidly."

Source: Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research

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