

# Teetotalers more likely to be depressed

August 28 2009

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Abstaining from alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk of depression according to a new study published in *Addiction* journal.

It has long been recognised that excessive [alcohol consumption](#) can lead to poor physical and [mental health](#). However, there has been mounting evidence that low levels of alcohol consumption may also be associated with poor mental health possibly due to abstainers having other health problems or being reformed [heavy drinkers](#).

The study utilised data from the Nord-Trøndelag Health Study (HUNT Study) based in Norway. This provided information on the drinking habits and mental health of over 38,000 individuals. Using this data the authors were able to show that those individuals who reported drinking no alcohol over a two week period were more likely than moderate drinkers to report symptoms of [depression](#).

Those individuals who additionally labelled themselves as "abstainers" were at the highest risk of depression. Other factors, such as age, physical health problems and number of close friends could explain some, but not all of this increased risk. The authors also had access to reported levels of alcohol consumption 10 years prior to the main survey. This showed that fourteen percent of current abstainers had previously been heavy drinkers, but this did not explain all of the increased risk of depression amongst abstainers.

The authors conclude that in societies where some use of alcohol is the

norm, abstinence may be associated with being socially marginalised or particular personality traits that may also be associated with mental illness.

It should also be noted that alcohol use is associated with many physical health problems, with excessive alcohol consumption being estimated to contribute to over 33,000 death in the UK each year and many more injuries. The current guidance is for men to drink no more than three to four units each day, and women to drink no more than two to three units.

More information: Skogen J. C., Harvey S. B., Henderson M., Stordal E., Mykletun A. Anxiety and depression among abstainers and low-level alcohol consumers. *Addiction* 2009; 104: 1519-1529

Source: Wiley ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Teetotallers more likely to be depressed (2009, August 28) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-08-teetotallers-depressed.html>

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