

Heavy alcohol use, binge drinking, might increase risk of pancreatic cancer, researcher reports

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Heavy alcohol use and binge drinking could increase the risk of pancreatic cancer in men, research from UT Southwestern Medical Center suggests.

In a study available online in [Cancer Causes and Control](#), researchers found that the more alcohol a man consumed, the higher his risk of pancreatic cancer compared with those who drank little or no alcohol.

"If this relationship continues to be confirmed, reducing heavy and binge drinking may be more important than we already know," said Dr. Samir Gupta, assistant professor of internal medicine at UT Southwestern and lead author of the study, which was conducted at the University of California, San Francisco.

Researchers found that men who consumed alcohol increased their risk of pancreatic cancer by 1.5 to 6 times compared with those who didn't consume alcohol or who had less than one drink per month. The increased risk depended on the amount and frequency of [alcohol consumption](#). Researchers found that the risk was greater no matter when in the past heavy drinking occurred.

They also found that men who engaged in binge drinking had a 3.5 times greater likelihood of developing pancreatic cancer. Their risk also was greater regardless of when the binge episodes occurred.

Researchers defined one drink as a can, bottle or 12 ounces of beer; a 4-ounce glass of wine; or one shot of liquor. Each of these servings contains about 14 grams of alcohol. The heaviest drinkers consumed 21 to 35 drinks per week. Binge drinking was defined as consuming five or more drinks during one drinking episode.

Researchers did not find the association among women, possibly due to the lower proportion of women who reported heavy or binge drinking, said Dr. Gupta, who also is affiliated with the Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center at UT Southwestern.

"Pancreatic cancer is one of the deadliest cancers, so any risk factor that can be identified and addressed may save lives," Dr. Gupta said. "Our research found that large and frequent amounts of alcohol consumption may be risk factors for pancreatic cancer."

Previous studies inconsistently have linked alcohol and pancreatic cancer.

Dr. Gupta said his study is different, however, because the researchers collected more detailed information on alcohol consumption and binge drinking than other studies and because the researchers were able to analyze the data for multiple factors that previously hadn't been considered in great detail.

In the current study, researchers used structured questionnaires to interview pancreatic cancer patients in the San Francisco area diagnosed between 1995 and 1999 and compared those results with those of control participants matched by sex, age and county of residence.

The 532 cancer patients ranged in age from 21 to 85, with the majority between 60 and 80 years of age. Fifty-five percent of study participants were men; 83 percent of them were Caucasian; and most of them were of normal weight with some college education. The 1,701 control

participants were of similar demographics.

Dr. Gupta said more research is needed to understand the differences in pancreatic cancer risk between men and women and to understand why heavy alcohol use and binge drinking may increase the risk of pancreatic cancer in men.

The next step, Dr. Gupta said, will be to see if other studies with detailed information on [alcohol](#) consumption and [binge drinking](#) have similar results.

Cancer of the pancreas, an organ important for digestion and production of hormones, has the lowest overall five-year survival rate of all specific cancers. Early signs of [pancreatic cancer](#) are difficult to diagnose, partly because the organ is located deep in the upper abdomen. Mortality rates have changed little in the past three decades, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Dr. Elizabeth Holly, who was the principal investigator, and Drs. Paige Bracci and Furong Wang also were involved in the UCSF study.

Provided by UT Southwestern Medical Center

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