

# Heavy drinking associated with increased risk of death from pancreatic cancer

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Heavy alcohol consumption, specifically three or more glasses of liquor a day, is associated with an increased risk of death from pancreatic cancer, according to a report in the March 14 issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine*.

"Alcoholic beverage consumption – a modifiable lifestyle factor – is causally related to several cancers, including oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colorectum and female breast," the authors write as background information in the article. "Heavy [alcohol consumption](#) causes acute and chronic pancreatitis but has never been linked definitively to [pancreatic cancer](#)."

Using data from the Cancer Prevention Study II (CPS-II), Susan M. Gapstur, Ph.D., M.P.H., and colleagues from the American Cancer Society, Atlanta, examined the association between alcohol intake and pancreatic cancer. The CPS-II is a long-term prospective study of U.S. adults 30 years and older. Initial data on alcohol consumption was gathered in 1982, and based on follow-up through 2006, there were 6,847 pancreatic cancer deaths among one million participants.

Of the million participants (453,770 men and 576,697 women), 45.7 percent of men and 62.5 percent of women were non-drinkers. The analyses of men only and of men and women combined showed statistically significant increased risk of pancreatic cancer death for consumption of three drinks per day and four or more drinks per day, whereas for women only the estimated risk of death from pancreatic

cancer was statistically significant for consumption of four or more drinks per day.

Compared with non-drinkers, consuming three or more drinks of liquor per day was associated with an increased risk of pancreatic cancer death in the total study population, and consumption of two or more drinks of liquor per day was associated with an increased risk in both never smokers and in those who had ever smoked. This association was observed for liquor consumption but not for beer or wine.

In never smokers, there was a 36 percent higher risk of pancreatic cancer death associated with consuming three or more drinks a day compared with non-drinkers for men and women combined. In those who had ever smoked, there was a 16 percent higher risk of death from pancreatic cancer after adjustment for smoking history and other variables.

"Findings from the prospective study presented herein strongly support the hypothesis that alcohol consumption, in particular heavy intake, also is an independent risk factor for pancreatic cancer, the fourth most common cause of [cancer](#) mortality [death] in the United States," the authors conclude.

**More information:** Arch Intern Med. 2011;171[5]:444-451

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