

Teenage alcohol consumption associated with computer use

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Teenagers who drink alcohol spend more time on their computers for recreational use, including social networking and downloading and listening to music, compared with their peers who don't drink.

Results of an anonymous survey of 264 [teenagers](#) were reported in the online edition of the journal Addictive Behaviors in a study authored by Weill Cornell Medical College public health researcher Dr. Jennifer Epstein.

"While the specific factors linking teenage drinking and computer use are not yet established, it seems likely that [adolescents](#) are experimenting with drinking and activities on the Internet. In turn, exposure to online material such as [alcohol advertising](#) or alcohol-using [peers](#) on [social networking sites](#) could reinforce teens' drinking," says Dr. Epstein, assistant professor of public health at Weill Cornell Medical College. "Children are being exposed to computers and the Internet at younger ages. For this reason it's important that parents are actively involved in monitoring their children's computer usage, as well as alcohol use.

"According to a national study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, more than half of parents of teenagers had filters installed on the computers their child uses to block content parents find objectionable, yet many parents do not use any form of parental monitoring, particularly for older teens," continues Dr. Epstein.

The Weill Cornell survey was completed by participants aged 13 to 17 and residing in the United States. Results showed that teens who reported drinking in the last month used a computer more hours per week excluding school work than those who did not; however, there was no demonstrated link between alcohol use and computer use for school work. Drinking was also linked to more frequent social networking and listening to and downloading music. There was no strong link between video games and drinking or online shopping and drinking.

"Going forward, we would like to collect more detailed and longer-term data on adolescent alcohol and computer use, including the degree and duration of their drinking habit," says Dr. Epstein.

Teenagers typically first experiment with alcohol at age 12 or 13. Family risk factors include lax parental supervision and poor communication, family conflicts, inconsistent or harsh discipline and a family history of alcohol or drug abuse.

"Parents may also need to reinforce their family ground rules on [alcohol](#) use and computer use," Dr. Epstein says.

"This is an innovative study that is an important first step to understanding the potential impact that the Internet and new media may have on today's youth," says Dr. Gil Botvin, professor of [public health](#) and chief of the Division of Prevention and Health Behavior at Weill Cornell Medical College. "The Internet offers a wealth of information and opportunities for intellectual and social enrichment. However, it is becoming clear that there may also be a downside to Internet use. More systematic research is needed to better understand to those potential dangers and how to combat them."

Provided by New York- Presbyterian Hospital

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