

Heavy drinkers have poor dietary habits

August 15 2011

Excessive drinking and an unbalanced diet are two preventable contributors to health problems in the developed world. Different studies have found varying linkages between amounts of alcohol consumed and quality of diet. A new study of adults in Spain has found that heavy drinking, binge drinking, a preference for spirits, and drinking alcohol at mealtimes were associated with a poor adherence to major food consumption guidelines.

Results will be published in the November 2011 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research* and are currently available at Early View.

"[Drinking alcohol](#) may reduce maintaining a healthy diet, leading to adverse metabolic effects which in turn add to those directly produced by [alcohol](#)," said José Lorenzo Valencia-Martín, a doctor at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and corresponding author for the study. "The specific influence of alcohol on diet may depend upon the overall quantity of alcohol ingested, frequency of consumption, beverage preference, and whether alcohol intake takes place during the meals. Alcohol may indirectly contribute to several chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular disease, or cancer."

"Unhealthy lifestyles tend to cluster together, but this is not a 'necessary' association," added Miguel A. Martínez-González, chair of the department of preventive medicine and Public Health at the University of Navarra. "On average, people who drink excessive alcohol are more likely to be careless in their dietary habits. A high alcohol intake is

especially unhealthy with respect to liver disease. A high-energy food pattern rich in trans fats – such as 'fast-foods' or items from a commercial bakery – is also likely to be related to liver disease. In this sense, if both unhealthy lifestyles cluster together, they can act synergistically to produce very adverse effects."

"In [Spain](#), alcohol is frequently drunk during meals, particularly lunch and dinner," said Valencia-Martín. "Because of this, and the lower prevalence of abstainers, our findings apply to most [adults](#) in Spain and in other Mediterranean countries in Europe. Our results are of relevance because they show that drinking at mealtimes is associated with insufficient intake of healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables, and with excessive intake of animal protein."

From 2000 to 2005, the researchers carried out a telephone survey of 12,037 adults (5850 men, 6187 women) considered representative of 18-to-64-year-olds in the region of Madrid. Binge drinking was defined as equal to or more than 80 grams of alcohol for men and equal to or more than 60 grams for women during one drinking session; the threshold between moderate and heavy drinking was 40 grams of alcohol per day for men and 24 grams per day for women. Food consumption was measured using a 24-hour recall.

"Excessive drinkers, either with or without binge drinking, showed a poor adherence to dietary recommendations," said Valencia-Martín. "Although drinking at mealtimes has traditionally been considered a safe or even a healthy behavior, our results point to some unintended consequences that the general populations should be aware of. In particular, drinking at mealtimes is associated with poor adherence to most of the [food consumption](#) guidelines. Also, not all types of alcoholic beverages are equal with regard to their dietary effects; our results suggest that a preference for spirits is associated with a poorer diet. Lastly, the above implications apply to both men and women."

"I believe the key finding of this study is the suggestion of a harmful effect of binge drinking on healthy eating habits," said Martínez González. "Binge drinking prevalence was found to be relatively high – greater than 10 percent – in a representative sample of Spanish population. This is very bad news. Alcohol misuse has become a priority public-health problem in Spain, especially because of rising rates of [binge drinking](#) and especially because of the abandonment of the traditional Mediterranean pattern of moderate alcohol drinking, in little amounts, generally red wine during meals. Recent changes, especially among young Spanish people, include a pattern of high amounts of spirits during weekends. This excellent study adds another unfortunate consequence of this change: the impairment of eating habits."

Martínez González added that both alcohol researchers and clinicians need to pay more attention to the dietary pattern of binge drinkers, and also consider that some of the detrimental effects attributed to alcohol might in fact be consequences of a poor diet.

"Don't forget that alcohol is addictive, that it replaces healthy calories from other foods by empty calories, meaning these calories are devoid of minerals and vitamins," said Martínez González. "Keep also in mind that the drinking pattern might be more important than the total amount consumed. The unhealthiest pattern is to consume high amounts – three to four drinks per day – of spirits or beer exclusively during the weekends. Conversely, the healthiest use of alcohol may be red wine, no more than one glass per day for women and two per day for men, and consumed during meals in a regular daily pattern."

Provided by Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research

Citation: Heavy drinkers have poor dietary habits (2011, August 15) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2011-08-heavy-drinkers-poor-dietary-habits.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.