

If you're over 60, drink up: Alcohol associated with better memory

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Credit: Kevin Casper/public domain

Researchers from the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, University of Kentucky, and University of Maryland found that for people 60 and older who do not have dementia, light alcohol consumption during late life is associated with higher episodic memory—the ability to recall memories of events.

Moderate alcohol consumption was also linked with a larger volume in the hippocampus, a brain region critical for episodic memory. The relationship between light alcohol consumption and episodic memory goes away if [hippocampal volume](#) is factored in, providing new evidence that hippocampal functioning is the critical factor in these improvements. These findings were detailed in the *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*.

This study used data from more than 660 patients in the Framingham Heart Study Offspring Cohort. These patients completed surveys on their alcohol consumption and demographics, a battery of neuropsychological assessments, the presence or absence of the genetic Alzheimer's disease risk factor APOE e4 and MRIs of their brains. The researchers found that light and [moderate alcohol consumption](#) in older people is associated with higher [episodic memory](#) and is linked with larger hippocampal brain volume. Amount of alcohol consumption had no impact on executive function or overall mental ability.

Findings from animal studies suggest that moderate alcohol consumption may contribute to preserved hippocampal volume by promoting generation of new nerve cells in the hippocampus. In addition, exposing the brain to moderate amounts of alcohol may increase the release of brain chemicals involved with cognitive, or information processing, functions.

"There were no significant differences in cognitive functioning and regional brain volumes during late life according to reported midlife alcohol consumption status," said lead author Brian Downer, UTMB Sealy Center on Aging postdoctoral fellow. "This may be due to the fact that adults who are able to continue consuming alcohol into old age are healthier, and therefore have higher cognition and larger regional brain volumes, than people who had to decrease their alcohol consumption due to unfavorable health outcomes."

Although the potential benefits of light to moderate [alcohol consumption](#) to cognitive learning and memory later in life have been consistently reported, extended periods of abusing alcohol, often defined as having five or more alcoholic beverages during a single drinking occasion is known to be harmful to the [brain](#).

More information: *American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias*, [aja.sagepub.com/content/early/ ... 17514549411.full.pdf](http://aja.sagepub.com/content/early/17514549411.full.pdf)

Provided by University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston

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