

# Binge drinking may not equal addiction, but it will hurt your health

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Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol this holiday may not make you an addict—according to a recent CDC report on the diagnostic criteria for alcoholism—but it will significantly damage your body.

"There are individuals who consume large amounts of alcohol that results in poor health outcomes and they may not meet classic criteria of [alcohol dependence](#); nevertheless, they need to be informed that the amount of [alcohol consumption](#) can affect their health," said Dennis Dimitri, MD, FAAFP, vice chair and clinical associate professor of [family medicine](#) & community health.

According to the [report released by the Center for Disease Control last month](#), "about nine of 10 adult excessive drinkers did not meet the [diagnostic criteria](#) for alcohol dependence." Researchers analyzed data from 138,100 adults who responded to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in 2009, 2010 or 2011.

About 90 percent of the adults who responded to the survey saying that they drank excessively reported [binge drinking](#) and the prevalence of alcohol dependence increased with the frequency of binge drinking.

"However, even among those who reported binge-drinking 10 or more times in the past month, more than two-thirds did not meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence according to their responses to the survey," the report said.

Excessive drinking, binge drinking and alcohol dependence were most common among men and those aged 18 to 24 years, a conclusion that several other studies found and that predate the current CDC study. Binge drinking was found to be most common among those with annual family income of \$75,000 or more; however, alcohol dependence was most common among those with annual family incomes of less than \$25,000, according to the study.

In terms of the prevalence of alcohol dependence, 10.2 percent of excessive drinkers were found to be dependent upon the drink, while 10.5 percent of binge drinkers and 1.3 percent of non-binge drinkers were considered to be dependent.

For Dr. Dimitri, president-elect of the Massachusetts Medical Society, the study is helpful in that it reinforces some of what he knows through his own practice and can help guide some of the treatment for those who drink excessively, but do not meet the criteria of addiction.

"Anecdotally, with many of the patients I see and that we ascertain are drinking in amounts not necessarily healthy for them, they do not display many of the behaviors that you typically think of alcoholism or depending upon alcohol—they get up every day and go to work, don't get in trouble with police—but they may be unaware of impact of drinking on their bodies," Dimitri said.

He said many different poor health outcomes are associated with drinking excessive amounts of alcohol. If average daily consumption of alcohol is greater than two drinks for men and one for women, it is associated with an increased risk of adverse of medical outcomes that include, but are not limited to, cirrhosis of the liver; high blood pressure; chronic heart disease; and ulcers and gastro-intestinal bleeding.

If a person is not showing telltale signs of alcoholism, a medical

professional can help to determine whether the person is consuming excessive amount of alcohol by using the CAGE questionnaire technique: has the patient been Criticized about alcohol intake; tried to Abstain and reduce the amount consumed; felt Guilty about use; or does the patient start the day with an Eye opener (have a drink to begin the day). This validated screening tool is sometimes used and if people answer in the affirmative to two or more that correlates with a high likelihood that they have an issue or problem, Dimitri said.

Provided by University of Massachusetts Medical School

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