

Binge drinking dangerous for young adults

February 19 2016

Having an occasional drink is fine, but "binge" drinking is a known health hazard and now high blood pressure may need to be added to the list of possible consequences. Young adults in their twenties who regularly binge drink have higher blood pressure which may increase the risk of developing hypertension, concludes a study conducted by researchers at the University of Montreal Hospital Research Centre (CRCHUM).

Binge drinking (i.e. consuming five or more alcoholic beverages in less than two hours), is quite prevalent: previous studies in Canada and the U.S. have shown that about four in ten young adults aged 18 to 24 are frequent binge drinkers.

Now researchers have demonstrated, for the first time, that [binge drinking](#) may have an effect on [blood pressure](#), which can increase the risk of developing hypertension and chronic diseases related to hypertension. "We found that the blood pressure of young adults aged 20 to 24 who binge drink was 2 to 4 millimetres of mercury higher than non-binge drinkers," says Jennifer O'Loughlin, senior author of a study published today in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Data on alcohol consumption at age 20 were collected from 756 participants in the Nicotine Dependence in Teens study, which has followed 1294 young people from diverse social backgrounds in Montreal, Canada since 1999. Data were collected again at age 24, at which time participants' systolic blood pressure was also taken. Systolic blood pressure measures the pressure in the arteries when the heart beats

(i.e., when the heart muscle contracts), and it should be below 140 millimetres of mercury. A [blood pressure reading](#) of more than 140 over 90 indicates [high blood pressure](#). The latter number, [diastolic blood pressure](#), measures the pressure in the arteries between heartbeats (i.e., when the heart muscle is resting between beats and refilling with blood).

"Our findings show that more than one in four young adults who binge drink meet the criterion for pre-hypertension (i.e., a systolic blood pressure between 120 and 139 millimetres of mercury). This is worrisome because this condition can progress to hypertension, which in turn can cause heart disease and premature death," says O'Loughlin, a researcher at the CRCHUM and professor in the School of Public Health, University of Montreal.

Health professionals and others may need to adopt a preventive approach, recommends O'Loughlin: "Poor diet, salt intake, and obesity are predictors of high blood pressure. Since we know there is a link between higher blood pressure and the risk of developing [chronic diseases](#), clinicians should ask young people about their [alcohol consumption](#). A slight and continuous increase in [systolic blood pressure](#) may be an important warning sign."

The study also revealed that 85% of [young adults](#) who drink heavily at age 20 maintain this behaviour at age 24. But unlike our genetic make-up, risky behaviour can be changed. The researchers will now investigate whether this trend toward high blood pressure will continue when binge drinkers turn 30. With work and family obligations, binge drinking may become less frequent. Other questions that arise include: will the short-term effects of binge drinking disappear when binge drinking declines? Is there a critical time period in which to intervene to prevent hypertension? While awaiting for answers to these questions, the old adage "moderation is always in good taste" may apply.

More information: Robert J. Wellman et al. Relationships Between Current and Past Binge Drinking and Systolic Blood Pressure in Young Adults, *Journal of Adolescent Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.10.251](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2015.10.251)

Provided by University of Montreal

Citation: Binge drinking dangerous for young adults (2016, February 19) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-02-binge-dangerous-young-adults.html>

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