

Researchers to study link between gastric bypass and alcohol abuse

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A new collaborative study from the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions and the Penn State College of Medicine will investigate why a significant percentage of people who undergo gastric bypass surgery develop alcohol abuse problems.

"Some recent findings have shown the risk of developing an [alcohol use disorder](#) following [gastric bypass surgery](#) was nearly double the risk in the [general population](#)," says Panayotis (Peter) K. Thanos, PhD, senior

research scientist at RIA. "Although other studies have shown the risk to be not quite that high, the numbers all point to the need for greater research in this area."

The greater likelihood of developing alcohol problems is additionally unusual because of the older age of those who undergo gastric bypass, Thanos says. "Most alcohol use disorders manifest during a person's teens or 20s. However, people who have gastric bypass tend to be older, so the alcohol abuse arises at a much later onset date than in the general population."

Thanos and his co-principal investigator, Andras Hajnal, MD, PhD, of the Penn State College of Medicine, will focus on the possible neurological causes for the increased vulnerability for alcohol use disorders in this population.

"We will explore whether this outcome is due to changes in the brain's dopamine system that are a unique result of the [gastric bypass](#) surgery, and independent of weight loss or post-surgical change of diet," Thanos says. "Such a change in the dopamine system may increase preference for and intake of alcohol based on its increased rewarding effects in the brain. This, in turn, poses an increased risk for development of addiction."

Results of the study could prove valuable to clinicians when they formulate personalized postoperative treatment plans for patients who may already have an increased risk of [alcohol](#) use disorders, in order to help prevent development of addiction.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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