

Older adults with long-term alcohol dependence lose neurocognitive abilities

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Heavy drinking can lead to neurophysiological and cognitive changes ranging from disrupted sleep to more serious neurotoxic effects. Aging can also contribute to cognitive decline. Several studies on the interaction of current heavy drinking and aging have had varied results. This study sought to elucidate the relations among age, heavy drinking, and neurocognitive function.

Researchers had 66 participants (35 women, 31 men), recruited from the Brown University Center for AIDS Research, undergo a comprehensive neurocognitive battery of testing. Current heavy drinkers (n=21) were classified using National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism criteria and structured clinical interviews and, further, were compared to non-drinkers and moderate drinkers (n=45). About 53 percent of the total population had a lifetime history of alcohol dependence (AD). Neurocognitive data were grouped according to global cognitive function, attention/executive function, learning, memory, [motor function](#), verbal function, and speed of processing.

Results showed that current heavy drinking in older adults was associated with poorer global cognitive function, learning, memory, and motor function. Furthermore, a lifetime history of AD was associated with poorer function in the same neurocognitive domains, as well as the attention/executive domain, notwithstanding age. In summary, although current [heavy drinking](#) is associated with significant impairment in a number of neurocognitive domains, it appears that a history of AD is associated with lasting negative consequences for [neurocognitive](#)

[function.](#)

More information: Adam J. Woods et al. Current Heavy Alcohol Consumption is Associated with Greater Cognitive Impairment in Older Adults, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.13211](#)

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