

# Got the 'drunchies'? New study shows how heavy drinking affects diet

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They're called the "drunchies," or drunk munchies. It's the desire one has to eat salty, fatty, unhealthy foods during or after a night of heavy drinking.

With obesity continuing to rise in America, researchers decided to look at a sample of college students to better understand how [drinking](#) affects what they eat, both that night and for their first meal the next day when, most likely, they're hungover. It should come as no surprise that they're not eating kale smoothies and fresh oranges at 4 a.m.

"Given the obesity epidemic and the rates of [alcohol](#) consumption on college campuses, we need to be aware of not only the negative effect of alcohol consumption, but also the impact it has on what people are eating while they are drinking," says Jessica Kruger, clinical assistant professor of community health and health behavior in the University at Buffalo's School of Public Health and Health Professions.

Kruger, Ph.D., is the lead author on a newly published paper that examines heavy episodic drinking and dietary choices while drinking and on the following day.

Kruger and her colleagues from the University of Michigan, University of Toledo, and Bowling Green State University, conducted their study on a sample of 286 students at a large public university in the Midwest. ([The study, published](#) in the *Californian Journal of Health Promotion*, did not receive any federal funding.)

Research on the effects of drinking and diet is scarce, Kruger said, adding that eating more unhealthy foods following alcohol consumption is an often overlooked behavior in traditional addiction research.

The inspiration for the study came from an ad she and some of her co-authors saw in a university newspaper. "It said, 'Got Drunchies?' and had ads for pizza, tacos, and other fast-[food](#) places that were open late after the bars closed," Kruger says.

With 65 percent of U.S. [college students](#) reporting that they regularly

drink alcohol, it's important, Kruger says, to study how [alcohol consumption](#) impacts diet, especially on and near college campuses, which tend to have a wealth of unhealthy fast-food options nearby.

Consider, for example, that the average beer contains 150 calories. If a person drinks five beers, that's 750 calories, or a third of their daily energy intake. Add two slices of pizza or a burrito to that at the end of the night, and it's a recipe for weight gain.

"So, we dug a bit deeper and first figured out what the 'drunchies' were, and then decided this would be interesting to study. Our first study in this area focused on what people ate while drinking alcohol. This study explored what they eat the day after drinking," Kruger said.

Study participants were asked to complete an anonymous online survey, which began with general questions around diet, such as "What do you typically eat for your first meal of the day?" and "How often do you eat something before you go to bed?"

Later in the survey, they were asked how often they ate something before bed on nights when they drank alcohol, and what they ate. They were also asked what they typically ate for their first meal the day after a night of binge drinking.

Researchers found that drinking influenced study participants' dietary behaviors before going to bed. "All alcohol drinkers were more likely to eat something before they went to bed after drinking alcohol than in general before they go to bed," Kruger and her colleagues wrote.

Specifically, they were more likely to opt for salty snack foods and pizza. Healthy foods, such as dark green vegetables and other veggies they would ordinarily eat, weren't as appealing.

Of particular concern, the researchers noted, was the fact that participants didn't report drinking more water or other non-alcoholic beverages before bed. That exacerbates dehydration, which may lead to additionally unhealthy food choices.

The following day after drinking, participants' dietary patterns varied from the night before. They were less likely to skip meals the morning after a night of drinking compared to a typical morning.

And they favored foods like pizza or tacos over milk and dairy products and grains, most likely because of the so-called hangover cures that get passed down to students and which entail eating foods that "soak up" the alcohol. Dispelling these myths is one way to promote a healthy diet even after a night of [binge drinking](#), Kruger says.

So what's happening in the body that causes the drunchies? "It is believed that after drinking alcohol, the amount of blood glucose in the body can rise and fall which stimulates the brain to feel hungry," Kruger explains.

Kruger says the study's findings point to the need for universities to encourage healthy eating at all times of the day, including late at night, by reducing the offerings of [unhealthy foods](#) and promoting nutrient dense options.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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