

Moderating your alcohol by saving drinks for the weekend? A study says there may be risks.

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That one night out with friends may be more harmful to your health than having a drink every day of the week, new research suggests.

A study published in June in the *American Journal of Preventive*

Medicine found moderate drinkers were more likely to engage in binge-drinking behaviors, leading to an increased risk of alcohol-related problems.

Researchers surveyed 1,229 drinkers ages 30 and older in 2004 to 2005, and again from 2015 to 2016. The participants were separated between moderate and [heavy drinkers](#), with [moderate drinking](#) defined as having an average of one drink per day over the course of a week.

Study authors asked participants how many times they engaged in binge-drinking behavior, defined as consuming five drinks or more in a short period of time, in the past month.

Although moderate drinkers averaged a drink per day, researchers found they accounted for more than 70% of binge drinking cases, suggesting many may be drinking their week's worth of alcohol in one sitting, said study coauthor Charles Holahan, a professor of psychology at the University of Texas at Austin.

"Focusing on average consumption alone hides different underlying patterns of drinking," he said. "An average moderate [drinker](#) of one drink a day might achieve that average by a daily drink with dinner or a more risky pattern of seven drinks on Saturday night."

When researchers surveyed participants nine years later, they found moderate drinkers accounted for nearly 80% of [alcohol problems](#), such as emotional or [psychological problems](#) and increased tolerance.

The findings suggest alcohol-related problems may be more associated with how much a person drinks instead of how often, authors said in the study.

Among these moderate drinkers, the study found patterns of binge

drinking increased the likelihood of alcohol-related health problems nearly fivefold. After nine years, the risk of multiple health problems was more than double that of participants who didn't binge drink.

According to the study, these findings indicate a need for public health efforts targeted at moderate drinkers.

The results reflect the range of potential long-term health impacts of alcohol even for those who aren't categorized as high alcohol users, said Sarah Andrews, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University. Such a trend could point to a need for improved medical screenings that ask for more details on drinking patterns.

"We typically ask about the average drinks you have in a week," Andrews said. "But really asking that specific question, since it's a kind of high-risk behavior, doesn't mean that there's alcohol use disorder, but it's a good screen."

The study also looks at the impacts of alcohol consumption on a population that has been less frequently researched, said Holahan, as previous studies have focused on binge drinking in adolescents and young adults.

For those who are looking to monitor their own alcohol intake, Holahan said it is important to be intentional about tracking consumption habits as well as quantities.

"Average [moderate drinkers](#) should pay attention to on-occasion pattern of drinking as well as average consumption," Holahan said. "They should talk with [family members](#) or a professional if they experience [health](#) or [social problems](#) from drinking."

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