

# On days when college students feel more impulsive than usual, their alcohol consumption may rise

March 6 2023

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Fluctuating impulsivity in college students is linked to increased positive thoughts about alcohol, heavier drinking, and more negative

consequences, a new study suggests—information that could inform more effective intervention programs to reduce alcohol harm. Almost a third of young adults report binge drinking in the past month, and 16% meet criteria for alcohol use disorder in the past year.

Impulsivity, a tendency to act rashly without considering consequences, is known to be associated with heavier drinking. A predictive behavioral model theorizes that impulsive people are particularly predisposed to certain beliefs about [alcohol](#) and that this influences their consumption.

These beliefs—alcohol expectancies—determine how individuals perceive the positive and negative effects of drinking. Positive expectancies (e.g., increased sociability) are linked to higher alcohol use, while negative expectancies (e.g., becoming impaired) are thought to restrain drinking behavior.

Recent research has indicated that impulsivity is not a stable personality trait. It is instead a state that varies throughout the day, even moment to moment—fluctuations that are associated with substance use and other risky behaviors. Moreover, when individuals are exposed to [environmental stimuli](#) related to alcohol (e.g., bars or drinking buddies), their expectations of drinking also fluctuate, potentially influencing behavior.

People with impulsive personalities appear more conscious of positive alcohol stimuli than negative ones. How these factors interact at any given moment, however, is not well understood. For the study published in *Alcohol: Clinical & Experimental Research*, investigators aimed to capture variabilities in everyday feelings, beliefs, and settings—the first-known test of whether fluctuations in impulsivity drive changes in alcohol expectancies, drinking, and related problems within a single day.

Researchers worked with 89 college student drinkers who reported

recent heavy drinking. For two weeks, the students filled out at least three surveys a day ("momentary reports") and two additional surveys on days that they drank alcohol. These surveys recorded in close to real time the participants' impulsivity, alcohol expectancies, alcohol consumed, and any negative consequences they experienced from drinking.

The process generated 3,577 reports. Each participant's typical scores were used to identify variations from their own norms. The researchers used [statistical analysis](#) to explore associations between daily impulsivity, alcohol expectancies, drinking, and related problems.

The data showed that students with higher impulsivity on any given day experienced more positive alcohol expectancies before drinking. Greater positive beliefs about alcohol, in turn, were linked to higher consumption and more [negative consequences](#) the same day. In contrast, negative expectations about alcohol were unrelated to same-day drinking behavior or related problems.

The findings complement previous evidence suggesting that impulsive people are more likely to remember the rewards of drinking (positive experiences) than its negative effects, driving a "learning bias" that may influence alcohol use at the daily level.

This first study to examine the relevant predictive model at the daily level confirms that feeling more impulsive than usual may drive more positive expectations of drinking and motivate higher alcohol consumption. The researchers recommend that interventions aimed at reducing hazardous drinking among [young adults](#) incorporate information about personality, especially impulsivity, and challenge strongly held beliefs about the positive effects of alcohol.

**More information:** Amy L. Stamates et al, Daily impulsivity and alcohol expectancies: A multilevel examination of the acquired

preparedness model, *Alcohol: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2023).  
[DOI: 10.1111/acer.15023](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.15023)

Provided by Research Society on Alcoholism

Citation: On days when college students feel more impulsive than usual, their alcohol consumption may rise (2023, March 6) retrieved 7 May 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-03-days-college-students-impulsive-usual.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.