

Ease up on drinking to cut your risk for 'holiday heart syndrome,' doctors warn

December 22 2023, by Dennis Thompson



Rum-laced eggnog, mulled wine, or a hot toddy all sound good around the holidays, but too much imbibing can increase your risk of "holiday heart syndrome," doctors warn.

Holiday heart syndrome is the unofficial name for a notable increase in patients seeking treatment in ERs for [heart rhythm problems](#) caused by too much booze around December, said Dr. Sharon Reimold, chair of cardiology at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

"It's common for people to go to multiple parties during this time of year," Reimold said in a university news release. "You go to one party and have a drink or two, go to the next party and have a couple more. It's the cumulative effect of alcohol that can put you at risk, sending your heart into [atrial fibrillation](#)."

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) involves irregular and rapid beating of the heart's upper chambers. The most common symptoms include shortness of breath, lightheadedness, [chest pain](#), heart palpitations and rapid heartbeat.

AFib increases a person's risk of stroke and [heart failure](#), Reimold said.

That's why even though symptoms can be sporadic and usual clear up within 24 hours, they should not be ignored, she said. People experiencing [heart problems](#) should always seek medical care.

Although there's a holiday-generated bump in cases around December, AFib can occur any time too much alcohol is consumed, Reimold said. Studies have shown that a significant percentage of new AFib cases are linked to boozing it up.

Too much food, particularly salty foods, can also increase risk of AFib.

Folks should pay attention to how much they're drinking and eating during holiday festivities, and practice moderation, Reimold said.

Guidelines for moderate alcohol consumption call for no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women. A drink is defined as 8 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine or 1.5 ounces of spirits.

Party hosts should offer non-alcoholic beers or wines, or "mocktails" that contain non-alcoholic spirits, Reimold added.

More information: The Cleveland Clinic has more about [holiday heart syndrome](#).

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Citation: Ease up on drinking to cut your risk for 'holiday heart syndrome,' doctors warn (2023, December 22) retrieved 12 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-ease-holiday-heart-syndrome-doctors.html>

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