

Binge drinking boosts heart risks, especially for women

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Imbibing more than a drink per day significantly raises heart risks for all, but binge drinking is especially harmful, particularly for women, new research shows.

"When it comes to binge drinking, both men and women with excess [alcohol](#) consumption had a higher risk of [heart disease](#)," said study lead author Dr. Jamal Rana. He's a cardiologist with the Permanente Medical Group in Oakland, Calif.

The new findings relied on data from more than 430,000 Californian

adults aged 65 and under.

"For women, we find consistently higher [heart] risk even without binge drinking," Rana said in a news release from the American College of Cardiology (ACC).

"I wasn't expecting these results among women in this lower age group because we usually see increased risk for heart disease among [older women](#)," he added. "It was definitely surprising."

The findings will be presented April 6 at the [ACC's annual meeting in Atlanta](#).

In the study, Rana's group tracked the heart health of nearly 243,000 men and 189,000 women who received care in the Kaiser Permanente Northern California integrated health organization.

Participants averaged 44 years of age and none of them had been diagnosed with [heart disease](#) at the start of the study.

The alcohol consumption of all patients was regularly assessed by network doctors. Rana's group divided participants into three groups: Low alcohol intake (one to two drinks per week for both men and women), moderate (three to 14 drinks per week for men and three to seven drinks per week for women), or high (15 or more drinks per week for men and eight or more drinks per week for women).

The study also tracked any history of binge drinking, defined as more than four drinks for men or more than three drinks for women, consumed in a single day in the past three months.

Overall, over 3,100 people went on to develop heart disease during the four-year follow-up covered by the study.

As alcohol intake rose, so did the odds of developing heart disease.

Among women, those who landed in the "high" alcohol consumption category had a 45% higher odds for heart disease than those placed in the lowest intake category, Rana's group found.

Binge drinkers were at even higher risk: They had a 68% higher risk for heart disease than women who reported even a moderate level of alcohol use.

Alcohol intake affected men's heart risk, too: Those placing in the highest level were 33% more prone to heart disease than those in the moderate level, the researchers found.

But the more urgent warning from the study pertains to women, Rana said.

"Women feel they're protected against heart disease until they're older, but this study shows that even when you're young or middle-aged, if you are a heavy alcohol user or binge drink, you are at risk for coronary heart disease," he said.

Drinking can damage heart health in many potential ways, added Dr. Sean Heffron, a cardiologist at the Center for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease, part of NYU Langone Heart, in New York City.

"It can have an impact on [blood pressure](#) [and] coagulation directly on the heart muscle itself," said Heffron, who wasn't involved in the new study. "It can also influence levels of different types of cholesterol, specifically HDL cholesterol within the blood, and can also have an influence on heart rhythm and conduction."

According to Rana and colleagues, women's bodies also process alcohol

differently than men's, which might explain women's increased vulnerability.

The findings in the new study echo those of prior research, Heffron said.

There have been "a number of prior cohorts that support [binge drinking](#) being associated with a whole bunch of bad things, including [coronary heart disease](#) risk," he said.

However, Rana believes that "we do not think about alcohol as one of the vital signs" for heart trouble.

"I think a lot more awareness is needed, and alcohol should be part of routine health assessments moving forward," he said.

Because these findings are to be presented at a medical meeting, they should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: Find out more about alcohol's effects on the heart at [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#).

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