

Older problem drinkers use more alcohol than do their younger counterparts

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Older adults who have alcohol dependence problems drink significantly more than do younger adults who have similar problems, a new study has found.

The findings suggest that older problem drinkers may have developed a tolerance for alcohol and need to drink even more than younger abusers to achieve the effects they seek.

Researchers at Ohio State University found that adults over age 60 who have alcohol dependence drink more than 40 [alcoholic drinks](#) a week on average, compared to between 25 and 35 drinks a week on average for those in younger age groups with similar problems.

In addition, older people with alcohol dependence have more binge drinking episodes per month than do their younger counterparts.

"A combination of high levels of drinking and the physiological effects of aging are particularly problematic for older adults," said Linda Ginzer, co-author of the study and a doctoral student in social work at Ohio State.

Ginzer, who conducted the research as part of her dissertation, did the study with Virginia Richardson, professor of social work at Ohio State.

They presented their results November 20 in Atlanta at a meeting of the Gerontological Society of America.

The researchers used data collected in the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. This was a national survey of more than 43,000 people collected in 2000-01 under the direction of the National Institute on [Alcohol Abuse](#) and Alcoholism.

Research has shown that Americans generally tend to drink less alcohol as they age. But these findings suggest that for certain groups of older adults - those with alcohol problems - alcohol use actually increases, Ginzer said.

For this study, the researchers used the survey results to classify heavy drinkers by age categories.

Two categories were of particular interest to the researchers. Those in the [alcohol abuse](#) category were those who showed mainly social-related problems related to their alcohol use, including legal issues, and engaging in physically hazardous activities such as driving after drinking. Those in the alcohol dependence category showed evidence of physiological problems related to their alcohol use, such as increasing drinking and continued use even after physical or psychological problems were apparent.

While adults over age 60 were less likely than other groups to be in the abuse or dependence categories, those who were in those categories tended to have higher drinking levels than did younger problem drinkers.

For one, older problem drinkers drank more each week than did others. In addition, older people in the dependence category had significantly more alcohol binges each month than did younger people in the same category. Binges were defined as men having five or more drinks in a day, or women having four or more drinks in a day.

Those over age 60 in the [alcohol dependence](#) category averaged 19

binges per month, while younger age groups in the same category averaged 13 to 15 monthly binges.

"More often than not, we think of binge drinking as occurring among college students or those in their 20s," Richardson said.

"But the fact is, binge drinking occurs among older people as well, and it is in fact worse among those who have problems with alcohol. It is something that clinicians and researchers need to consider."

Overall, binge drinking was greater among all adults who were in the [alcohol](#) abuse category than it was among other adults who reported drinking seven or more drinks a week, but did not fall into the problem categories.

"That suggests [binge drinking](#) may be a better measure of problem drinking than just the total amount of drinks someone has per week," Ginzer said.

Source: The Ohio State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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