

A bad buzz: Men with HIV need fewer drinks to feel effects

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Researchers at Yale and the VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System compared the number of drinks that men with HIV infection, versus those without it, needed to get a buzz. They found that HIV-infected men were more sensitive to the effects of alcohol than uninfected men.

The study published April 17 in the journal *AIDS and Behavior*.

Researchers know that HIV and [alcohol](#) can make for a dangerous mix. "Alcohol makes it more likely you're going to get HIV due to [risky sexual behavior](#)," said Dr. Amy C. Justice, professor of medicine and public health at Yale. "Once people have HIV, alcohol makes it less likely they will take their antiretroviral medications." Drinking, like HIV infection, also harms the liver and immune system.

To examine the effects of alcohol on HIV patients, the Yale team and their co-authors reviewed data on more than 2,600 men enrolled in the Veterans Aging Cohort Study, an ongoing multi-site study of veterans. They analyzed survey responses from both HIV-infected and uninfected veterans who were asked how many alcoholic drinks it took for them to feel a buzz or high. The researchers also compared responses from HIV-infected men with unsuppressed or detectable HIV infection versus those with suppressed HIV.

The study found that HIV-infected men with detectable virus were more sensitive to the [effects of alcohol](#) than both HIV-infected men with suppressed virus and uninfected [men](#). On average, the HIV-infected

individuals with detectable virus got a buzz from imbibing just a quarter less of a drink than the others.

"All else equal, people who have HIV infection have a lower tolerance for alcohol than similar people without HIV infection," Justice explained. It's not clear, she added, whether HIV-infected individuals are simply more susceptible to alcohol or if they achieve higher concentrations of alcohol in the blood from the same number of drinks.

The findings suggest that there is no clearly safe level of alcohol consumption for people with HIV, and that providers should counsel their HIV-infected patients that they are more susceptible to the harmful effects of drinking, say the researchers.

More information: *AIDS and Behavior*, link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10461-015-1053-7

Provided by Yale University

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