[IMAGE]

Can Alcohol Use Up Dementia Risk?

By Editorial Staff

Enjoy an alcoholic drink now and then? What about every day? Multiple drinks every day? The closer you get to being a heavy drinker, you risk more than just liver damage and other health issues commonly recognized as related to alcohol use or abuse; you also risk suffering from early dementia.

Alzheimer's disease is the most common dementia, but it's not the only one. In fact, according to the Alzheimer's Association, "dementia is not a specific disease. It's an overall term that describes a wide range of symptoms associated with a decline in memory or other thinking skills severe enough to reduce a person's ability to perform everyday activities." Not a pretty picture, no matter how you word it.

Researchers examined five years' worth of health data on 31 million-plus patients, more than 1 million of whom had been diagnosed with dementia. Approximately 5 percent of dementia patients had early-onset dementia (symptoms beginning before age 65), and were significantly more likely to be heavy drinkers. In fact, heavy drinkers were three times more likely to suffer dementia and twice as likely to experience early-onset dementia, according to study findings published in *The Lancet Public Health*.

The study defined heavy alcohol users as those having an "alcohol use disorder," meaning "mental and behavioral disorders due to former or current chronic harmful use of alcohol." That's certainly more than a drink or two per day, but it's also more common than you might think. In fact, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), 15.1 million U.S. adults had an alcohol abuse disorder as of 2015, as did more than 600,000 youth ages 12-17. Food for thought...

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