

[IMAGE]

What Alcohol Can Do to Your Brain

Atherosclerosis comes from the Greek word "athero" (gruel or paste) and "sclerosis," or hardness. Fatty deposits and other substances, or plaque, accumulate in the artery's inner lining, and are more prone to occur when a person ages. This can cause blockage of blood flow or clot different blood vessels, which can eventually lead to a heart attack or stroke.

A group of 1,909 middle-aged adults underwent cerebral MRI exams. The study found that White matter lesions and ventricular and sulcal size increased as alcohol consumption increased. Lead researcher Jingzhong Ding explained: "There is no brain tissue in the ventricular and sulcal areas, as these areas are filled with cerebrospinal fluid. Therefore, an increase in ventricular and sulcal size indicates a reduction in the brain tissue, or brain atrophy, around the ventricular and sulcal areas."

Previously, the Cardiovascular Health Study, sponsored by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, found that moderate alcohol intake was associated with fewer brain infarcts (dead tissue). This study adds to this existing evidence, and the researchers note that "the process might begin earlier in life than [previously] suggested."

Reference:

Ding J, Eigenbrodt ML, Mosley TH, Hutchinson RG, Folsom AR, Harris TB, Nieto FJ. Alcohol intake and cerebral abnormalities of magnetic resonance imaging in a community-based population of middle-aged adults. *Stroke* 2004;35, pp16-21.

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