



Binge drinking dramatically increases the risk of Alzheimer's disease in over 65s

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)



Beers before bedtime: Drink is known to kill brain cells

Binge drinking dramatically increases the risk of Alzheimer's disease in older people, according to new research.

A study of more than 5,000 over 65s found those who drank heavily at least twice a month were two and a half times as likely to suffer a severe decline in their mental ability and memory as they aged.

Doctors have linked alcohol consumption to the development of the condition in between 10 and 24 percent of the estimated 700,000 people in the UK with the disease.

Dr Iain Lang, of the Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry at the University of Exeter, who carried out the research, said: 'In our group of community dwelling older adults, binge drinking is associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline.

'That is a real worry because there is a proven link between cognitive decline and risk of dementia.

'Those who reported binge drinking at least twice a month were more than twice as likely to have higher levels of decline in both cognitive function and memory.

'These differences were present even when we took into account other factors known to be related to cognitive decline such as age and level of education.'

The findings, presented at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference 2012 in Vancouver is the first to report the cognitive effects of binge drinking in older people.

The researchers analysed participants in a health survey of US adults for eight years from 2002 and found those who reported binge drinking at least once a month were 62 percent more likely to be in the group experiencing the greatest 10 percent of decline in mental abilities.

They were also 27 per cent more likely to be in the group experiencing the greatest 10 per cent of memory loss.

Those reporting heavy episodic drinking twice a month or more were two-and-a-half times more likely to be among those in the 10 per cent biggest decline in cognitive function and memory loss.

Interestingly, outcomes were similar in both sexes as women who drink a lot are believed to be at much greater risk than men of suffering problems with their cognitive functions, because they are physiologically less well able to cope with alcohol's effects.

Drink is known to kill brain cells, but the estimate of its impact on neurological health indicates the problem may be much more widespread than previously thought.

Consumption of four or more drinks on one occasion was considered binge drinking. Cognitive function and memory were assessed using telephone interviews.

Dr Lang said: 'We know binge drinking can be harmful: it can increase the risk of harm to the cardiovascular system, including the chance of developing heart disease; and it is related to an increased risk of both intentional and unintentional injuries.

'However, until we conducted our study it was not clear what the effect was of binge drinking on cognitive function and the risk of developing dementia.'

The research showed binge drinking once a month or more was reported by 8.3 per cent of men and 1.5 per cent of women; binge drinking twice a month or more was reported by 4.3 per cent of men and 0.5 per cent of women.

Added Dr Lang: 'This research has a number of implications. First, older people - and their doctors - should be aware that binge drinking may increase their risk of experiencing cognitive decline and encouraged to change their drinking behaviours accordingly.

'Second, policymakers and public health specialists should know that binge drinking is not just a problem among adolescents and younger adults. We have to start thinking about older people when we are planning interventions to reduce binge drinking.'

Previous research has suggested heavy drinking may be to blame for one in four cases of dementia.

Doctors fear binge drinking is likely to produce an epidemic of alcohol-related brain damage in the future, which could see drinkers starting to experience serious memory problems in their 40s.

Another study showed consuming more than two drinks a day can bring forward the onset of Alzheimer's by as much as 4.8 years.

Other research has shown moderate drinking, of up to two drinks a day, can help protect against the onset of dementia.

Read more: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2175213/Binge-drinking-increases-risk-Alzheimers-disease.html#ixzz20y3vGqXj>