Alcohol Overuse Increases Risk of Cognitive Decline

Two studies reported at the Alzheimer’s Association International Conference 2012 suggest that moderate alcohol use in late life, heavier use earlier in life, and binge drinking in late life increase risk of cognitive decline.

Researchers followed more than 1,300 women 65 and older for 20 years. They measured frequency of current and past alcohol use at the beginning, midpoint (Years 6 and 8), and late phases (Years 10 and 16) of the study. The researchers assessed participants at the end of the study for mild cognitive impairment and dementia. At baseline, 40.6% were nondrinkers, 50.4% were light drinkers (0 to 7 drinks per week), and 9% were moderate drinkers (7 to 14 drinks per week). Heavy drinkers (14 drinks per week) were excluded.

The researchers found that:

- Women who reported drinking more in the past than at the beginning of the study were at 30% increased risk of developing cognitive impairment.
- Moderate drinkers at baseline or at midpoint had similar risk of cognitive impairment to non-drinkers; however, moderate drinkers in the late phase of the study were approximately...
60% more likely to develop cognitive impairment.

- Women who changed from non-drinking to drinking over the course of the study had a 200% increased risk of cognitive impairment.

In a separate study, researchers performed a secondary analysis of data from 5,075 participants 65 and older in the Health and Retirement Study—a biennial, longitudinal, nationally representative survey of U.S. adults 50 and older—to assess the effects of binge drinking on cognition and mood in older people. Baseline data were collected in 2002 and participants were followed for 8 years. Consumption of four or more drinks on one occasion was considered binge drinking. Cognitive function and memory were assessed using the Telephone Interview for Cognitive Status. The researchers found that:

- Binge drinking once per month or more was reported by 8.3% of men and 1.5% of women; binge drinking twice per month or more was reported by 4.3% of men and 0.5% of women. Outcomes were similar in men and women when analyzed separately.

- Participants who reported heavy episodic drinking once per month were 62% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest decline in cognitive function and were 27% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest amount of memory decline. Participants reporting heavy episodic drinking twice per month or more were 147% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest decline in cognitive function and were 149% more likely to be in the group experiencing the highest amount of decline in memory.

Treating Perpetrator Reduces Chance of Domestic Violence

A new University of Houston experiment takes an unconventional look at the treatment for domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence (IPV), by focusing on changing the perpetrator’s psychological abuse during arguments rather than addressing his sexist beliefs.

The researchers focused on male perpetrators because men are the perpetrators in approximately 85% of abuse cases, and women are 10 times more likely than men to be murdered by an intimate partner.

The research team recruited 120 couples in the Houston area who qualified for the experiment. Candidates for the study were screened over the telephone to make sure they met criteria.

To meet the criteria to participate in the study, two acts of violence had to occur in the past year that might include pushing, shoving, choking, using a weapon, or beating. If there was no physical abuse but the couple scored low for marital satisfaction, they were included as a comparison group.

The research team observed a couple in a 15-minute argument. Both partners were connected to monitors to measure heart rate, respiration, skin conductance, movement, pulse, and skin temperature while affect was noted. The researchers interrupted the argument at 7.5 minutes and randomly assigned the male batterer to one of three conditions: (a) a time out; (b) a request to edit out the negative, where he makes the same points in a more neutral fashion; or (c) a request to accept influence where he listens to the woman’s ideas, trusts that his partner may be right, and validates her idea even if his idea is different. The male batterer was taught these communication skills then asked to use them in the second half of the argument.

The interventions decreased aggressive attacks on the female partner, contemptuous behavior, criticism, and put downs toward both the woman and the man. The idea is that reducing such psychological abuse may reduce IPV.

Mobile App Available for Supplemental PTSD Therapy

The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have released PE (prolonged exposure) Coach, a smartphone mobile application for use with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) treatment. Both departments use PE therapy as an effective treatment for PTSD. PE Coach is a free app for Apple and Android mobile devices.
The purpose of the Man Therapy campaign is to provide men approaching crisis—and their loved ones—a place to learn more about men’s mental health, examine their own mental health, and consider a wide array of actions that will put them on the path to treatment and recovery. The message is that all men should be aware of their mental health, treat it like they would a broken leg, and strive to get better.

The centerpiece of the campaign is the http://www.mantherapy.org website, where visitors will find a virtual appointment with “Dr. Rich Mahogany.” He greets visitors, makes them feel at ease, and then provides an overview of what they will find and explore during their visit.

From there, visitors can navigate through Dr. Mahogany’s office, where they can find useful information about men’s mental health including a guy’s guide to Gentlemental Health™. Men can choose to take an 18-question quiz to evaluate their own mental health status. They can also access resources and explore a wide range of choices, from do-it-yourself tips to professional therapist referrals. Additional resources include links to local support groups as well as a national suicide crisis line.

In addition to the website, the integrated communications campaign also includes a 30-second television public service announcement, three viral videos, social media promotions, outdoor boards, and outreach materials, including posters, coasters, and Dr. Mahogany’s business card for partners who will distribute materials throughout Colorado.

Researchers Oppose Facebook Depression Claim

A study of university students is the first evidence to refute the supposed link between depression and the amount of time spent on Facebook and other social media sites.

The study, published online in the Journal of Adolescent Health, suggests that it may be unnecessarily alarming to advise patients and parents on the risk of “Facebook depression” based solely on the amount of Internet use.

The study was prompted by a report last year from the American Academy of Pediatrics, suggesting that exposure to Facebook could lead to depression. Researchers surveyed 190 University of Wisconsin-Madison students ages 18 to 23, using a real-time assessment of Internet activity and a validated, clinical screening method for depression.

The students were surveyed with 43 text message questionnaires at random intervals over a 7-day period between February and December 2011. The students were asked if they were currently online, how many minutes they spent online, and what they were doing on the Internet.

The study found that the survey participants were on Facebook for more than half of the total time online. When the researchers evaluated the data, including the depression screening results, they found no significant associations between social media use and the probability of depression.