

Binge drinking 'increases risk' of dementia

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

dementia
neurological

impairment
prevalence

onset
cognitive

vulnerable
intake

abstain
widespread

1. _____ problems are related to the nervous system.
2. If someone is described as _____, they are easily affected by something damaging or harmful.
3. A _____ process is one that is connected with recognizing and understanding things.
4. If there is a _____ of something, it is very common in a particular place or among a particular group.
5. A _____ problem happens in many places or affects many people.
6. _____ is a serious illness that affects the brain and memory and is particularly common in old people.
7. If you _____ from an activity, you deliberately avoid doing it because, although it may be enjoyable, it may not be healthy.
8. Your _____ is the amount of something that you eat or drink.
9. The _____ of a disease is the point at which it begins to affect a person.
10. _____ is the fact that a part of your body is unable to do something fully.

2 What do you know?

Decide whether these statements are true (T) or false (F). Then check your answers in the text.

1. Men are less able physiologically to cope with the effects of alcohol than women.
2. Alzheimer's disease is a form of dementia.
3. Women have more body water and less body fat than men.
4. Abstaining from alcohol does not help brain cells to regenerate.
5. Dementia linked to alcohol intake is more common among richer people with rich diets.
6. Some research has shown that drinking up to two alcoholic drinks a day can protect against the onset of dementia.

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More under-65s – and women in particular – will suffer alcohol-related brain damage, say doctors

Denis Campbell, health correspondent
10 May, 2009

- 1 Heavy drinking may be to blame for one in four cases of dementia. Doctors have linked alcohol intake to the development of the brain-wasting condition in between 10 and 24% of the estimated 700,000 people in the UK with the disease. They warn that binge drinking and increased consumption are 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.
- 2 Women who drink a lot are 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.
- 3 Drink is known to kill brain cells, but the estimate of its impact on neurological health, contained in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, indicates that the problem may be much more widespread than previously thought. The rise in the amounts that people drink means "it is therefore likely that prevalence rates of alcohol-related brain damage are currently underestimated and may rise in future generations", say the authors.
- 4 Dr Jane Marshall, one of the co-authors and consultant psychiatrist at the Maudsley Hospital in south London, said: "People think that dementia is something that happens to people over 65. But a lot of those under 65 have got cognitive problems and a large proportion of the problems in that group are related to alcohol. Alcohol-related brain damage may account for 10-24% of all cases of all forms of dementia. We know that alcohol is associated with serious cognitive impairment. It reduces memory and general cognition," she added.
- 5 These findings follow research in America last year indicating that consuming more than two drinks a day can bring forward the onset of Alzheimer's by as much as 4.8 years. Two thirds of all the 700,000 people in the UK with dementia have Alzheimer's. "Drink is more likely to help induce dementia in women than men because women have more body water and less body fat, which means that they metabolize alcohol differently and so are more vulnerable," said Marshall.
- 6 Women who drink the same as men have a higher risk of cognitive impairment for that reason, in the same way that they are at higher risk of getting alcohol-related liver disease. However, a heavy drinker of either sex who abstains from alcohol can expect to see brain cells regenerate and improvements in key areas of brain activity.
- 7 Gayle Willis of the Alzheimer's Society said: "We know that the prolonged use of alcohol can lead to memory deficiencies. Only one third of the people with Alzheimer's are diagnosed, but the problem of under-diagnosis of people with alcohol-related memory impairment could be even greater." But the society believes that only a handful of all cases of dementia, perhaps as few as 3%, are directly attributable to alcohol.
- 8 Marshall and her colleagues examined Korsakoff's syndrome, a little-known form of dementia linked to alcohol intake, characterized by short-term memory loss, changes in behaviour and confusion. It is increasingly common in Scotland and the Netherlands, especially among poorer people with poor diets. One study of sufferers found that half were under 50.
- 9 Professor Ian Gilmore, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said: "It is really concerning that awareness among clinical staff of this important link between alcohol and dementia remains poor, yet detection of early signs often gives a real chance of successfully heading off the condition. It is vital that we improve understanding among doctors and nurses about the links between heavy drinkers

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and neurological damage. Equally important is that people understand that alcohol-related brain damage can strike at any time of life."

- 10 Other research has shown that moderate drinking, of up to two drinks a day, can help protect against the onset of dementia. Dr Allan Thomson, the guest editor of *Alcohol and Alcoholism* and spokesman for the Medical

Council on Alcohol, has written to Dawn Primarolo, the UK public health minister, warning that the National Health Service must give alcohol-related brain damage the same priority it has put into liver problems linked to heavy drinking.

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- Why are women more likely to develop dementia from drinking alcohol than men?
 - Because their metabolism is different.
 - Because they drink more than men.
 - Because they don't like the effects of alcohol.
- According to the Alzheimer's Society, what percentage of cases of dementia are directly attributable to alcohol?
 - 10 – 24%
 - Two thirds
 - 3%
- When can alcohol-related brain damage strike?
 - When people are in their 40s.
 - Over the age of 65.
 - At any time of life.
- What happens if people abstain from alcohol?
 - It successfully prevents the onset of dementia.
 - Some important areas of brain activity show improvements.
 - It will delay Alzheimer's disease by an average of 4.8 years.

4 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

- A two-word expression meaning *consuming too much alcohol over a short period of time*. (para 1)
- A verb meaning *to cause something, especially a mental or physical change*. (para 5)
- A verb meaning *to change food or drink in the body into energy*. (para 5)
- A noun meaning *a lack of something that your body needs*. (para 7)
- A noun meaning *a very small number of people or things*. (para 7)
- An adjective meaning *caused by a particular situation, event or activity*. (para 7)
- An adjective meaning *extremely important*. (para 9)
- A verb meaning *happen suddenly and unexpectedly causing harm or damage*. (para 9)

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5 Phrasal verbs

Match the phrasal verbs with their meanings.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1. head off | a. avoid doing something that is enjoyable but may not be healthy |
| 2. put into | b. be the reason for |
| 3. bring forward | c. spend time and effort doing something |
| 4. account for | d. deal successfully with |
| 5. cope with | e. change the date so that something happens earlier |
| 6. abstain from | f. prevent something from happening |

6 Word building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

- The report says that rates of alcohol-related brain damage have been _____ and there may be more cases than previously thought. [ESTIMATE]
- Men and women metabolize alcohol _____. [DIFFERENT]
- _____ use of alcohol can lead to memory deficiencies. [LONG]
- Korsakoff's syndrome is _____ by short-term memory loss. [CHARACTER]
- It is _____ common in Scotland and the Netherlands. [INCREASE]
- _____ of early signs of dementia gives a real chance of preventing the condition. [DETECT]

7 Discussion

Discuss this statement:

"If you give up smoking and drinking, you don't actually live longer. It just seems longer."

Clement Freud (1924-2009, English broadcaster, writer and politician)