

Binge drinking 'increases risk' of dementia

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

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

dementia
cognitive

metabolize
consumption

onset
moderate

vulnerable
impairment

abstain
prolonged

1. A _____ process is one that is connected with recognizing and understanding things.
2. _____ is a serious illness that affects the brain and memory and is particularly common in old people.
3. If you _____ from an activity, you deliberately avoid doing it because, although it may be enjoyable, it may not be healthy.
4. Your _____ is the amount of something that you eat or drink.
5. The _____ of a disease is the point at which it begins to affect a person.
6. When your body _____ food or drink it changes it into energy.
7. A _____ amount is neither very great nor very small.
8. _____ means *continuing for a long time*.
9. _____ is the fact that a part of your body is unable to do something fully.
10. If someone is described as _____, they are easily affected by something damaging or harmful.

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible.

1. How many people in the UK suffer from dementia?
2. What percentage of dementia cases may be linked to alcohol consumption?
3. How many dementia sufferers in the UK have Alzheimer's disease?
4. According to the Alzheimer's Society, what percentage of dementia cases are caused by alcohol?
5. How many drinks constitute 'moderate' drinking?
6. In which two countries is Korsakoff's syndrome becoming more common?

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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 the cause of one in four cases of dementia. Doctors have linked alcohol consumption to the development of the brain-wasting condition in between 10 and 24% of the estimated 700,000 people in the UK who have the disease. They say that binge drinking and increased consumption are likely to produce an epidemic of alcohol-related brain damage in the future, with drinkers beginning 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 their bodies are less able to cope with the effects of alcohol.
- 3 It is well-known that alcohol kills brain cells, but the estimate of its impact on the nervous system, contained in the journal *Alcohol and Alcoholism*, indicates that the problem may be much more common than people previously thought. The increase in the amounts that people drink means "it is likely that 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 of the report and a consultant psychiatrist at a London hospital, 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 be the cause of 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 cause dementia in women than men because women have more body water and less body fat, which means that they metabolize alcohol differently and are more vulnerable as a result," 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 problems. Only one third of the people with Alzheimer's are actually diagnosed with the disease, 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 caused by alcohol.
- 8 Marshall and her colleagues examined Korsakoff's syndrome, a rare form of dementia linked to alcohol consumption, 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 people suffering from the condition found that half of them were under the age of 50.
- 9 Professor Ian Gilmore, president of the Royal College of Physicians, said: "It is a real worry that clinical staff seem unaware of this important link between alcohol and dementia, because detection of early signs often gives a real chance of successfully preventing the condition. It is vital that we improve understanding among doctors and nurses about the links between heavy drinkers and damage to the nervous system. It

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is equally important that people understand that alcohol-related brain damage can happen at any time of life.”

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

has written to the UK public health minister, warning that the National Health Service must give alcohol-related brain damage the same priority it has given to liver problems linked to heavy drinking.

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3 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. Dementia only happens to people over 65.
2. Drinking more than two drinks a day can cause Alzheimer's disease to begin earlier.
3. Women are more at risk than men from dementia caused by alcohol.
4. If you stop drinking alcohol, you won't get dementia.
5. Alcohol-related brain damage can only occur after the age of 50.
6. Moderate drinking can help protect against dementia.

4 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. A two-word expression meaning *consuming too much alcohol over a short period of time*. (para 1)
2. A two-word phrasal verb meaning *to deal successfully with something*. (para 2)
3. A noun meaning *effect*. (para 3)
4. A verb meaning *to think that something is smaller than it really is*. (para 3)
5. A noun meaning *a very small number of people or things*. (para 7)
6. An adverb meaning *more and more over a period of time*. (para 8)
7. A noun meaning *the process of finding something using scientific methods*. (para 9)
8. An adjective meaning *extremely important*. (para 9)

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5 Phrases with prepositions

Complete the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

under between to among on in of with

1. changes _____ behaviour
2. the effects _____ alcohol
3. its impact _____ the nervous system
4. problems related _____ alcohol
5. associated _____ serious memory problems
6. common _____ poorer people
7. _____ the age of 50
8. the link _____ heavy drinking and memory loss

6 Word building

Complete the table.

	verb	noun
1.	detect	
2.	improve	
3.	consume	
4.	develop	
5.	behave	
6.	understand	

7 Discussion

Why do you think alcohol is a problem in some societies? What measures can governments take to help people to reduce their alcohol consumption?