

Plain Language Summary

Title: Alcohol Abuse: Will it hurt your heart?

Name: David Ewart

Plain Language Summary: Blood is our body's internal fuel. Each and every organ and structure in the body requires a constant supply of it in order to function properly. Blood must be 'oxygenated' in the lungs; this process is similar to refilling the gas tank on a car. This 'oxygenated' blood is then pumped, by the heart, to the rest of our body. This is the function of the heart.

A heart attack occurs when the blood supply to the heart is interrupted and the organ no longer has the fuel it needs to function properly. As a result it cannot pump blood to the rest of our body and everything stops working when the fuel runs out. The heart's blood supply can be interrupted a number of ways, but the most common is for a clot to get stuck in the blood vessels supplying it. There are a number of risk factors for this happening: smoking, high cholesterol in your blood, high blood pressure, diabetes, being overweight, not getting enough exercise, a poor diet, stress, age, being male, and a family history of heart disease.



The role alcohol has in heart disease is unclear. Lots of research has shown that 1 drink per day for women and 1-2 drinks per day for men is beneficial from the standpoint of the heart. Research has also shown that excessive quantities of alcohol, including current or past binge drinking, leads to a shorter life for both men and women. It is difficult to say, however, that alcohol increases your chances of having a heart attack. The problem with studying this relationship is that people who drink a lot often do many other things that put them at risk for having a heart attack, such as smoking, not exercising, and eating a bad diet. Alcohol can also

directly affect other risks for a heart attack, such as increasing your blood pressure and cholesterol, stressing you out, and causing you to gain weight.

In summary, it is difficult to say that alcohol abuse directly causes heart attacks, but it is still recommended that you not abuse alcohol, especially if you are worried about or at risk for heart disease.

Resources:

Information

1. National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute:
<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/hd/>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:
http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/risk_factors.htm
3. PubMed Health:
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001940/>

Get Help

1. Alcoholics Anonymous
<http://www.aa.org/?Media=PlayFlash>

Key Words:

Heart disease
Alcohol abuse
Risk factors

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