Alcohol’s Effects on Brain Can Begin to Subside Soon After Person Stops Drinking

Alcohol's damaging effect on the brain can begin to subside two weeks after a person stops drinking, a new study suggests.

Recovery may vary among different areas of the brain, the researchers say.

The findings could offer promising news for recovering alcoholics, according to *HealthDay*.

The study included 49 alcoholics in an inpatient treatment program, who were compared with 55 people who did not abuse alcohol. Participants underwent a brain scan within 24 hours of detoxification, and again two weeks later. The researchers found two weeks after detoxification, drinkers had a rapid recovery of the brain from alcohol-induced volume loss—a shrinkage of brain matter and an accompanying increase of cerebrospinal fluid, which acts as a cushion for the brain.

"This volume loss has previously been associated with neuropsychological deficits such as memory loss, concentration deficits and increased impulsivity," lead researcher Gabriele Ende of the Central Institute of Mental Health in Germany said in a news release.

The study found some parts of the brain were able to recover from chronic alcohol abuse faster than others.

The cerebellum, which controls motor coordination and motor skills, recovered quickly.

Areas that control higher cognitive functions such as divided attention took a longer time to recover. The study, published in *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, has implications for treatment, according to the researchers. "Many alcohol treatment programs only deal with the withdrawal stage of abstinence from alcohol, that is, the first three days," co-researcher Natalie May Zahr of Stanford University School of Medicine noted.

"Based on the current study and others, clinicians should consider recovery programs that provide support for the recovering addict for a minimum of two weeks."

If you're visiting the NCADD website to find out about alcohol, you are in the right place. We have chosen to have a separate section about alcohol because it is our most commonly used drug and it represents our number one drug problem. To read more, click here.