

Starting to Drink at Younger Age Linked With Heavier Drinking Later in Life



The earlier a person starts drinking, the greater the chance he or she will consume more alcohol later in life, according to a new study of humans and rats.

People who start drinking during puberty consume more alcohol later in life than those who start drinking later.

Science Daily reports researchers in Germany studied 283 young adults, and asked them when they first started drinking. Their drinking behavior—the number of days they drank, the amount of alcohol they consumed, and whether their drinking was considered hazardous—was assessed at ages 19, 22 and 23. The researchers also studied the effects of early alcohol exposure on drinking patterns later in life in 20 rats.

The researchers found people who had their first drink during puberty had elevated drinking levels compared with those who started drinking at a later age. The animal study found that rats receiving free access to alcohol during puberty consumed more alcohol as adults, compared with animals that first came into contact with alcohol during adulthood.

The results are published in *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

In a news release, lead researcher Miriam Schneider explained why the study included both humans and animals. "Adolescents have their first drink at very different ages," she said. "It would be unethical to make adolescents have their first drink in the course of a study, so this variable requires a longitudinal epidemiological study or experimental animal research to assess drinking behavior."

She added, "Puberty is a very critical developmental period due to ongoing neurodevelopmental processes in the brain. It is exactly during puberty that substances like drugs of abuse — alcohol, cannabis, etc. — may induce the most destructive and also persistent effects on the still developing brain, which may in some cases even result in neuropsychiatric disorders, such as schizophrenia or addictive disorders."

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Helping a friend or family member struggling with alcohol or drugs can be heartbreakingly painful but, with help, it can be remarkably rewarding. At times, it can seem so overwhelming that it would be easier to ignore it, pretend that nothing is wrong and hope it just goes away. In the long run, however, denying it or minimizing it, will be more damaging to you, other family members, and the person you are concerned about. Don't Wait, Now Is The Time. [Click here](#) to learn how to help someone if you are concerned for them.