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Malt Liquor Drinkers at Higher Risk for Substance Abuse: Study

Beverage tied to heavy drinking, marijuana use above typical profiles

MONDAY, Aug. 6 (HealthDay News) -- Young adults who drink malt liquor are at greater risk for alcohol problems and more likely to use marijuana, a University at Buffalo study says.

Malt liquor is an inexpensive, high-alcohol (6 percent to 11 percent alcohol) beverage often marketed to teens, the researchers noted.

"In our study of young adults who regularly drink malt liquor, we found that malt liquor use is significantly related to reports of alcohol problems, problems specific to the use of malt liquor, and to marijuana use above and beyond typical alcohol use," study leader R. Lorraine Collins said in a prepared statement. Collins is a research professor in the department of psychology and a senior research scientist at the university's Research Institute on Addictions.

The study included 639 young adults (average age about 23) who regularly consumed 40 ounces or more of malt liquor a week. The study participants were heavy drinkers -- they averaged 30 alcoholic drinks -- including 17 malt liquor drinks -- a week.

Marijuana was the illicit drug of choice for 46 percent of participants who reported simultaneous use of malt liquor and marijuana. Participants who used both malt liquor and marijuana together smoked an average of 19 marijuana cigarettes a week, while those who did not use malt liquor and marijuana together smoked an average of two joints a week.

Study participants who reported simultaneous malt liquor/marijuana use had started drinking alcohol at a younger age (between 13 and 14 years) and reported more substance use (particularly marijuana) and more alcohol-related problems than those who did not use malt liquor and marijuana together.

The study also found that 61 percent of participants reported that they drank one to two 40-ounce containers of malt liquor in a typical drinking session.

"These results suggest that regular consumption of malt liquor, beyond that associated with typical alcohol use, may place young adults at increased risk for substance abuse problems," Collins said. "Although many of these young people may not yet meet diagnostic criteria for alcohol dependence, there is clearly a need for prevention strategies targeted to their patterns of drinking and particularly excessive drinking of malt liquor."

The study was published in the June issue of the journal *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*.

More information

The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about [substance abuse](#).

-- Robert Preidt

SOURCE: University at Buffalo, news release, July 25, 2007

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