

## For women, getting drunk boosts heart attack risk

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By Anne Harding

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - A new study provides yet more evidence that when it comes to alcohol and health, moderation is key.

While women who drank were at lower risk of having a non-fatal heart attack than their peers who abstained from alcohol, getting drunk once a month or more sharply increased their risk, Dr. Joan M. Dorn of the University at Buffalo, New York and colleagues found.

"We know that if it's enough to slur your speech or alter your behavior it's too much, even for your heart," Dorn told Reuters Health.

"It's kind of a marker for a whole different lifestyle -- women who get intoxicated might be very different from those who don't," she added. "It may also be a marker for the way certain women metabolize alcohol." The researcher pointed out that, for some women, a single drink is enough to bring on intoxication.

There is considerable evidence that drinking moderately can lower heart disease risk, but there is less information on how patterns of drinking influence risk for women, Dorn and her team explain in the journal *Addiction*.

To investigate, she and her colleagues compared 320 women who had suffered non-fatal heart attacks with 1,565 healthy controls. Overall, 13 percent of the study participants had never been drinkers, while those who drank alcohol consumed an average of about 2 drinks on the days that they drank.

Among the heart attack patients, 8.5 percent reported drinking enough to become intoxicated on occasion, compared to 1.3 percent of the controls.

Women who drank as little as one or fewer drinks on days when they drank had a significantly lower risk of heart attack than abstainers, while those who drank three drinks a day had about half the risk of abstainers, as did those who drank daily.

However, women who reported getting intoxicated at least once a month were at nearly triple the risk of abstainers, while their risk was more than six times greater than that of women who drank alcohol but never got drunk. "They don't have to get drunk every weekend, it was just as little as once a month," Dorn noted.

The message of the findings, Dorn concludes, is "if you don't drink, don't start, but if you're concerned about heart health, light to moderate consumption does appear to lower risk, but there's an upper limit."

SOURCE: *Addiction*, May 2007.

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