

Any alcohol use increases dementia risk, study finds

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Any amount of alcohol consumption may increase the risk of dementia, a new large-scale study has found.

The University of Oxford, Yale University, and the University of Cambridge have described their research into alcohol consumption and dementia risk as the most comprehensive to date.

The findings, published in *BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine*, suggest that alcohol use, even at moderate levels, may have no safe threshold when it comes to brain health.

Dr Anya Topiwala, senior clinical researcher at Oxford Population Health, consultant psychiatrist, and lead author of the study, said the results challenged the "common belief that low levels of alcohol are beneficial for brain health".

She added: "Genetic evidence offers no support for a protective effect - in fact, it suggests the opposite.

"Even light or moderate drinking may increase the risk of dementia, indicating that reducing alcohol consumption across the population could play a significant role in dementia prevention."

Among the key findings of the study was that a three times higher increase in the number of alcoholic drinks per week increased the risk of dementia by 15%.

The new study combined observational data from more than half a million participants in the US Million Veteran Program, and UK Biobank.

Researchers also investigated links between the genetically-predicted likelihood of drinking alcohol, and alcohol misuse, for more than 2.4 million participants in 45 individual studies.

Dr Joel Gelernter, Professor at Yale University and senior author of the study, said the results would have clinical implications, as medical knowledge seemed to previously support that some light drinking could be beneficial to brain health.

Dr Stephen Burgess, statistician at the University of Cambridge, said: "The random nature of genetic inheritance allows us to compare groups with higher and lower levels of alcohol drinking in a way that allows us to make conclusions that untangle the confusion between correlation and causation.

"Our findings do not only hold for those who have a particular genetic predisposition, but for anyone who chooses to drink, our study suggests that greater alcohol consumption leads to higher risk of dementia."