

Rethinking drinking

Alcohol increases stroke risk immediately and long-term

On the prevention front, a 2013 University of Eastern Finland study shows excessive alcohol consumption increases the progression of atherosclerosis and the risk of stroke in middle-aged men. The findings were reported as part of the FinnDrink Study Oct. 21 and mirror earlier data showing an increased stroke risk for drinkers of both genders regardless of age, even with only moderate consumption.

The Finnish research found that progression of atherosclerosis over an 11-year follow-up was increased among men who consumed six or more drinks on one occasion. Stroke risk also increased among men who had at least one hangover per year. Drinking large quantities of alcohol more than twice a week also increased the risk of stroke death in men.

And strokes aren't only a concern for older adults. Early in 2013, a separate study at the University of California at San Francisco (UCSF) concluded that one of every five strokes occurs in people between 18 and 44 years of age. That's men and women.

"When a young person has a stroke, it is probably much more likely that the cause of their stroke is something other than traditional risk factors," such as hypertension and obesity, according to one of the lead researchers in the study.

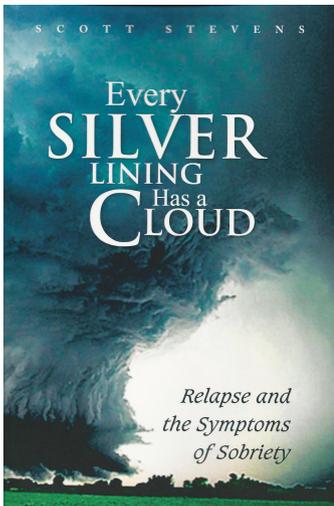
The UCSF researchers say long-term changes in the heart as a result of alcohol abuse or the disease of alcoholism may put younger users at higher-than-average risk earlier in life. "Substance abuse is common in young adults experiencing a stroke," according to the research team. "Patients aged younger than 55 years who experience a stroke should be routinely screened and counseled regarding substance abuse."

Stroke risk is heightened by even a small amount of alcohol according to an Oct. 2014 study posted on Canadian medical news website Tele-Management. Just one drink of alcohol was found to double stroke risk immediately after consuming the beverage. After two hours, the risk of stroke is increased 1.6 times when compared to the risk before having the drink.

The research was not based on any specific type of alcoholic beverage.



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