Heavy Drinking Is Linked With Increased Risk of Death Among People With HIV

Any history of heavy alcohol use is associated with death of any cause while recent heavy drinking is linked with liver-related death.

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People with HIV with a history of heavy drinking have a higher risk of death from any cause, and those with a recent history of such alcohol consumption are more likely to die of liver cancer.

Publishing their findings in HIV Medicine, researchers conducted a prospective cohort study between 2000 and 2013 of 1,855 people living with HIV in Baltimore. They determined alcohol use levels through two means: self-reporting by participants via a computer-assisted self-interview and medical-provider-documented alcohol as registered in medical charts.

The researchers defined heavy drinking as more than four drinks per day or 14 drinks per week for men and more than three drinks per day or seven drinks per week for women. Moderate drinking was any consumption less than those thresholds. Nondrinkers consumed no alcohol.

Overall, the death rate per 1,000 cumulative years of life among the participants was 43 deaths of any cause (known as all-cause mortality) and 7.2 liver-related deaths.

The highest rate of all-cause mortality was seen among those who self-reported as nondrinkers but whose physicians documented them as heavy drinkers during the previous six months; they had a death rate of 85.4 per 1,000 cumulative years. The lowest all-cause mortality rate, at 23 deaths per 1,000 cumulative years, was seen among those who self-reported as moderate drinkers who had no physician-documented heavy drinking in their history.

Compared with self-reported moderate drinkers with no physician-documented history of heavy drinking, those with a physician-documented history of recent heavy drinking who self-reported as either nondrinkers or moderate drinkers were a respective 7.28- and 3.52-fold more likely to die from liver-related causes.

The researchers concluded that any heavy alcohol consumption was associated with a raised risk of death from any cause among people living with HIV. Only recent heavy consumption was linked

with liver-related death. They stressed that assessing an individual's current level of alcohol consumption is insufficient to properly assess his or her overall risk of death.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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