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Hard Alcohol Ups Risk of Colon Cancer

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HealthDay Reporter

MONDAY, Oct. 13 (HealthDayNews) -- If you've given up wine in favor of martinis, you might want to give wine another chance.

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That's because new research found people who consumed more than nine drinks a week that contained distilled spirits, such as vodka and whiskey, were three times more likely to have common types of colorectal cancer. Wine, on the other hand, appeared to cut that risk.

The study is being presented Oct. 13 at the American College of Gastroenterology annual meeting in Baltimore.

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"We found a strong association between spirits and the presence of left-sided neoplasia [a lesion on the colon that may be cancerous]," says one of the study's authors, Dr. Gurvinder Sethi, an assistant instructor in medicine at Stony Brook University in Stony Brook, N.Y. "The risk was 3.3 times higher than for people who didn't drink at all."

Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers, taking more than 57,000 lives annually, according to the American Cancer Society. This year, the cancer society estimates, more than 145,000 people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

Dr. Joseph Anderson, an assistant professor of medicine at Stony Brook University who was also involved in the research, says the study was designed to see whether colorectal cancer screening recommendations needed to be changed for people who drank alcohol.

For the research, almost 2,000 volunteers were recruited to have screening colonoscopies. A colonoscopy is a test designed to look for colon cancer. Using a thin, flexible tube equipped with a light and a camera, doctors can examine the length of the colon.

The average age of the study participants was 57 and they were equally male and female, Anderson says. About 90 percent were white and all were from the Stony Brook area, which Anderson describes as affluent.

Along with a colonoscopy, information was gathered from each volunteer on drinking history, weight, family medical history, diet, smoking history, education and exercise.

The researchers found those who drank more than nine beverages containing spirits a week had three times the risk of having

cancer or a suspicious lesion found during their colonoscopies compared to people who didn't drink at all. Heavy beer drinkers appeared to face about double the risk, but Anderson says the difference wasn't statistically significant.

Drinking wine appeared to have a protective effect, and reduced the risk of having cancer or a suspicious lesion, Anderson says.

Anderson says he's not sure why spirits would be associated with more suspicious lesions.

Dr. Ann Silverman, a gastroenterologist at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich., says it's possible there may be chemicals involved in the processing of these products, or it could be another factor altogether, such as a history of aspirin use, that the volunteers had in common.

Because the group of people drinking more than nine glasses of spirits a week only comprised 66 people, Silverman says, the sample is too small to really draw any conclusions.

"I think the results are interesting, but it's too preliminary to make any recommendations or suggest screening changes," she adds.

Anderson says the most important thing people need to remember is that "lifestyle, including alcohol consumption, has an impact on your risk of getting colorectal [cancer]."

More information

To learn more about colorectal cancer, go to the [National Cancer Institute](#) or to the [American Cancer Society](#).

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