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How Alcohol Affects Your Brain

Poor memory, slurred speech, impaired coordination. We know that excessive alcohol consumption affects our brain function in the short-term. But how can its impact on the brain potentially lead to stroke?

Stroke is an attack on the brain

There are two types of strokes: ischemic, in which plaque build-up or a blood clot impairs blood flow to the brain, and haemorrhagic, in which a burst vessel causes blood to leak into the brain(1).

How is alcohol linked to ischemic stroke?

Ischemic stroke is the most common type, affecting 87% of all patients. Heavy alcohol consumption can trigger an ischemic stroke caused by blood clots, especially in those that already suffer with heart conditions. In one study, it was found that all patients with an irregular heartbeat who were alcohol drinkers had a significantly higher risk of ischemic stroke than non-drinkers, regardless of the amount of alcohol consumed weekly(2).

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How is alcohol linked to haemorrhagic stroke?

Although this type of stroke is less common, representing only 13% of all stroke events, there is a consensus amongst reports that heavy alcohol consumption is associated with haemorrhagic strokes. Regular heavy drinking is also associated with an increased risk of high blood pressure, which adds to the likelihood of a haemorrhagic stroke. It is therefore best to drink alcohol in moderation, if at all(3).

How common is alcohol-induced stroke?

While it’s almost impossible to determine how many strokes are directly linked to alcohol, we know that a lot of strokes are caused by high blood pressure; diabetes; being overweight; and having an irregular heartbeat. All of which are worsened by drinking alcohol(5).

What reduces the effects of alcohol on the brain?

It goes without saying that you can reduce the harmful effects of drinking simply by giving up completely. But this isn't always an easy option. The good news is, even cutting down can dramatically reduce the negative effects on your health.

References

1. *https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/types-of-stroke.*
2. *Estie Mermelstein, MSN, FNP-BC. Alcohol Increases Ischemic Stroke Risk in Newly Diagnosed Atrial Fibrillation. The Caridology Advisor. July 13 2021.*
3. *https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/stroke/symptoms-causes/syc-20350113. Stroke Symptoms and Causes. 9 Feb, 2021.*
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