

Quitting Smoking: Does it Result in Changes in Alcohol Consumption?

Cigarette smokers drink alcohol more often and more heavily than nonsmokers, and smoking and heavy drinking combine to produce especially negative effects on health. Although frequent heavy drinking has been associated with decreased odds of quitting smoking, the extent to which quitting smoking is associated with reduced drinking is less clear. In an article in the current issue of "*Drug and Alcohol Dependence*," researchers report on an examination over a 2-year period on whether individuals who quit smoking for at least 6 months, compared to those making a quit attempt but continuing to smoke and to those not making any attempt to quit smoking, showed greater reductions in drinking frequency, average weekly quantity of alcohol consumption, and frequency of heavy drinking.

Christopher W. Kahler, Ph.D., from the Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies at Brown University, and colleagues addressed these questions using data from the International Tobacco Control Four Country Survey, a prospective cohort study of smokers in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. A total of 3,614 participants provided alcohol data at one study wave and were re-interviewed 2 years later regarding smoking and alcohol use.

Consistent with prior studies, individuals who drank heavily (4+/5+ drinks for women and men, respectively) more than once a week had especially low rates of quitting smoking. There was little evidence, however, that those who had quit smoking for more than 6 months made greater reductions in drinking compared to those who continued to smoke and those who made an unsuccessful quit attempt. These results were consistent across countries and sexes and did not differ significantly by heaviness of smoking. Results indicate that quitting smoking, in and of itself, does not lead to meaningful changes in alcohol use. Therefore, interventions and policies directed towards increasing smoking cessation are unlikely to affect rates of hazardous drinking unless they include specific elements that address alcohol consumption.

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Contact:

Christopher W. Kahler, Ph.D., Center for Alcohol and Addiction Studies, Brown University, Box G-S121-5, Providence, RI USA 02912. Email: Christopher_Kahler@brown.edu Phone: 401-863-6651 Fax: 401-863-6697