Alcohol Consumption More Detrimental to Women

What the Study Found

Alcohol consumption more severely affects women than men. Women become alcohol dependent more quickly than men and alcohol more severely impairs women's cognitive functioning including perceptual and visual planning and processing, working memory and motor control.

Results from a new study showed that female alcoholics experience a greater decrement in cognitive and motor functions and sustain an accelerated decline in processing speed than males, which confirm and extend prior research that alcohol exerts more profound adverse effects more quickly on women compared to men.

Other studies have shown that female drinkers experience accelerated damage to the liver, heart and muscles, compared with male alcoholics.

Female alcoholic participants responded more slowly on tasks that measured reaction times than other groups, suggesting that alcohol more significantly impairs women's working memory processes. Female alcoholics also performed more poorly than male alcoholics on tests of spatial planning, problem solving and cognitive flexibility.

This was despite the fact that female alcoholics were, on average three years younger than male alcoholics, had four fewer years of alcohol dependence and two and a half fewer years of alcohol use than the male alcoholic subjects.

The study suggests that alcohol-dependent women experience cognitive problems associated with alcohol abuse in addition to the well-known findings of greater negative physiological effects.

The study compared 24 female alcoholics, 78 male alcoholics and 68 male and female non-alcoholics. All participants were under age 40 to avoid age effects of cognitive parameters.

According to the authors it is not known to what degree and at what period of sobriety alcoholics can recover cognitive impairments.