

Nearly 32 million Americans engage in extreme binge-drinking: study

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Almost 32 million US adults admit to extreme binge-drinking at least once in the past year, meaning they consumed eight to 10 alcoholic beverages—or more—in a single sitting, US government scientists said on Wednesday.

The study in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* found that instances of extreme binge-drinking from 2012-2013 were up significantly from a decade earlier.

"This important study reveals that a large number of people in the United States drink at very high levels and underscores the dangers associated with such 'extreme' binge drinking," said George Koob, director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

"Of the nearly 90,000 people who die from alcohol each year, more than half, or 50,000, die from injuries and overdoses associated with high blood alcohol levels."

Binge-drinking is defined as having four or more drinks on an occasion for women, or five or more for men.

Extreme binge-drinking means imbibing at least twice that amount.

Using US government health surveys, researchers found that 39 percent of adult males and 27 percent of adult females reported "level one"

binge-drinking during the previous year, meaning four to seven drinks for women, or five to nine drinks for men.

Among men, 11 percent reported "level two" binge-drinking, meaning they consumed 10-14 drinks on a single occasion.

Seven percent of men reported drinking "level three" bingeing, or 15 or more drinks in one sitting.

For women, five percent reported drinking double the binge-drinking threshold—or between eight and 11 drinks in a sitting—and three percent reported drinking 12 or more at least once in the past year.

People who drank to excess were far more likely to wind up in the emergency room, have a substance use disorder, get hurt because of drinking, be the driver in a car crash, and be arrested or have legal problems resulting from alcohol use.

Extreme binge-drinking was also particularly common among people who used other drugs.

"Drinking at such high levels can suppress areas of the brain that control basic life-support functions such as breathing and heart rate, thereby increasing one's risk of death," said senior author Aaron White.

"The risk increases further if other sedative drugs, particularly opioids or benzodiazepines, are added to the mix." Valium, for instance, is a common benzodiazepine.

Study authors said more work is needed to find ways to cut down on extreme binge drinking and its negative consequences.

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