



NEWS

Drinking Alcohol and Atrial Fibrillation: Even Small Doses of Alcohol Increase the Risk

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Atrial fibrillation is the most common cardiac arrhythmia. Drinking alcohol is one of the common risk factors for this disorder. Alcohol abstinence, on the other hand, acts as a protective factor. However, these findings are based mainly on questionnaire surveys, which may not be completely reliable.

The aim of the study by Marcus et al. (2021) was to determine the incidence of episodes of atrial fibrillation shortly after drinking alcohol. The study was conducted in 100 outpatient adults with paroxysmal atrial fibrillation. ECGs were continuously recorded in the subjects and the subjects were asked to press a button on the monitor each time they drank alcohol.

The number of episodes of atrial fibrillation preceded by drinking alcohol and the number of episodes not preceded by drinking alcohol were compared over time. This limited the influence of other variables such as age, other diseases, or medication. Fifty-six subjects had an episode of atrial fibrillation. Those who had an episode of atrial fibrillation were approximately twice as likely to have drunk alcohol four hours before the episode of atrial fibrillation. This risk increased further if a six-hour interval was considered and if a higher dose than 14 g of 100% alcohol was involved (i.e. probably more than 150 ml of wine or 375 ml of 12° beer). According to the authors, the association between alcohol dose and risk of cardiac arrhythmias was linear, i.e. a higher alcohol dose was associated with a higher risk of arrhythmias. The finding that even a small dose of alcohol increases the risk of atrial fibrillation can be considered a unique contribution of this work. The authors conclude that episodes of atrial fibrillation are often triggered by drinking alcohol in disposed persons, a behavior that is relatively easy to influence. This is an important finding given the prevalence of this cardiac disorder and the fact that it substantially affects the quality of life of affected persons.

An editorial on the same topic appeared in the same issue of *Annals of Internal Medicine* (Piano and Hwang 2021). Its authors acknowledge the significance of this work and its relevance to clinical practice.

Keywords

Biofeedback, Athletes, Sport psychology, Psychophysiology

References

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