

Re: Decreased antioxidant levels increase risk of age-related macular degeneration with exposure to sunlight

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Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.nutrition/2008-11/msg00177.html>

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 - *Date:* Wed, 26 Nov 2008 01:52:57 +0200
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The news article

Four beers a day 'could make you blind'

By Tamara McLean. The Australia, November 25, 2008

<<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24705517-12377,00.html>>

reports a study presented at an ophthalmology conference in Melbourne as follows:

"KNOCKING back four beers a day doesn't just risk a serious beer gut – it could also be damaging your eyesight, a study of Australian men has found.

Melbourne research shows men in their 60s who drink alcohol heavily are about six times more likely to develop the most debilitating form of age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

About 15 per cent of Australians are affected by the disease – where sight fades in the centre of the visual field – and 1 per cent will have the advanced or end-stage form that eventually steals sight.

Smoking and genetics have been linked to the condition but Dr Elaine Chong from the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital decided to study the diet and eye health of almost 7000 people over a period of time to determine the contribution of alcohol.

"We found that higher levels of alcohol, more than four standard drinks a day, was associated with a three-fold increase in end-stage AMD in men," Dr Chong said.

Beer drinking, in particular, carried a six-fold increased risk. Quantities of wine and spirits drunk were too low to evaluate their risk.

The same link was not seen in women, possibly because they were

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less likely to drink heavily, she said.

Explaining the trigger, Dr Chong said it was possible alcohol could increase oxidative stress to the retina.

"Alcohol is a neurotoxin so it is thought that high levels can actually cause retinal damage that might lead to the disease," she said.

An earlier study found rats fed alcohol in the lab were more likely to develop signs of end-stage AMD.

While the new findings, presented at an ophthalmology conference in Melbourne today, suggest drinking habits could be contributing, it may not be that clear cut.

"It might be that heavy drinkers were also more likely to smoke, which is a well-identified disease risk," Dr Chong said.

"But regardless, heavy alcohol intake is harmful so cutting back will always do you good."

An earlier meta-analysis

Alcohol consumption and the risk of age-related macular degeneration: a systematic review and meta-analysis.

Chong EW, Kreis AJ, Wong TY, Simpson JA, Guymer RH.

Am J Ophthalmol. 2008 Apr;145(4):707-715. Epub 2008 Feb 1. Review.

PMID: 18242575

doi:10.1016/j.ajo.2007.12.005

<[http://www.ajo.com/article/S0002-9394\(07\)01013-6/abstract](http://www.ajo.com/article/S0002-9394(07)01013-6/abstract)>

concludes:

"Conclusions

Heavy alcohol consumption (more than three standard drinks per day) is associated with an increased risk of early AMD. Although this association seems to be independent of smoking, residual confounding effects from smoking cannot be excluded completely."

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