# New research highlights links between alcohol, anxiety, and dementia risk



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#### Links Between Alcohol Consumption and Dementia

As individuals age, lifestyle choices such as alcohol consumption become increasingly significant. Research has demonstrated a clear connection between alcohol intake and an elevated risk of cognitive decline, Alzheimer's disease, and various forms of dementia. Alcohol can cause inflammation and stress in the brain, leading to neuron damage. Moreover, it interferes with neurotransmitter systems essential for learning and memory, thus raising the likelihood of cognitive impairment.

Experts from Usay Compare, a medical insurance company, advise re-evaluating drinking habits around the age of 65. This stage in life is particularly crucial as the cumulative effects of alcohol on brain health become more noticeable, significantly increasing the risk of dementia and falls.

Although there is substantial evidence that excessive alcohol consumption heightens dementia risk, moderate drinking has not been conclusively linked to such outcomes. Excessive, prolonged drinking may lead to deficiencies in vital nutrients such as vitamin B1 (thiamine), potentially resulting in Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome, which impacts short-term memory. National Health Service (NHS) guidelines indicate safe limits for alcohol consumption, stating, for example, that a typical glass of 12% ABV wine accounts for 2-3 units, depending on the volume.

Healthcare guidelines such as those from NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) advise reducing alcohol intake, especially during mid-life, to lower risks of age-related issues such as frailty and dementia.

#### Study on Anxiety and Dementia

Meanwhile, another study published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society indicates a significant link between anxiety and increased dementia risk. Conducted by researchers from Hunter New England Health in Newcastle, Australia, the study suggests that anxiety can nearly triple the risk of developing dementia in later years.

The research is detailed in a prospective study involving 2,132 participants aged 60 and above, initially recruited between December 2004 and December 2007. The participants underwent three assessments, each five years apart, and their anxiety levels were measured at the first and second assessments. Dementia occurrences were tracked using international diagnostic codes and pharmaceutical data from the Australian Department of Health and Aged Care.

Out of the study participants, 64 developed dementia. The findings revealed that both chronic and newly onset anxiety were associated with almost tripling the dementia risk. Chronic anxiety, in particular, had a robust correlation with dementia diagnosis within an average timespan of 10 years.

The study highlighted that stress increases cortisol and inflammation in the brain, which can damage nerve cells. Anxiety is also linked with an accumulation of beta-amyloid, a hallmark of Alzheimer's disease, and can lead to structural changes in the brain, such as hippocampal atrophy.

However, the research has some limitations, including the measurement of anxiety being limited to the four weeks prior to the assessments and a significant dropout rate among participants with higher anxiety levels at the study's beginning.

#### Key Takeaways

These findings collectively underscore the importance of addressing lifestyle factors such as alcohol consumption and anxiety to mitigate the risk of cognitive decline and dementia. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, managing stress, and prioritising brain health could play a crucial role in reducing dementia risk as individuals age.

For those dealing with anxiety, various treatments are available, including cognitive behavioral therapy and lifestyle modifications such as better diet, regular physical activity, and improved sleep. Always consult healthcare professionals for tailored advice and interventions.