



PANDEMIC-INDUCED CONSUMPTION

Since 2019, news of the novel coronavirus, known as COVID-19, has been spreading throughout American households. Tragically, COVID-19 has infected over 100 million people worldwide and killed millions of those infected. The elderly and adults with certain underlying conditions are the most at risk. However, there is mounting evidence suggesting that substance misuse, including alcohol, may affect health outcomes after contracting COVID-19, as well.

What's more, the social restrictions imposed to slow the spread of the virus have contributed to increased alcohol consumption. Alcohol addiction has increased by 14% from previous years. Increased pandemic stress and in turn, loss of healthy coping methods, are likely responsible for this increase. The COVID-19 pandemic and issues of alcohol misuse worsen each other like a chain reaction.



DANGER TO YOUR IMMUNITY

Alcohol misuse, such as binge drinking, can lead to a lowered immune system response. During a pandemic when a highly contagious virus is easily spread, a lower threshold of immunity may be the difference between life and death. Excess alcohol consumption targets the immune system in a number of ways.

Stomach microbes are often not the first to come to mind when considering an effective immune response. However, a delicate balance of bacteria exists within the body's gastrointestinal tract. Alcohol consumption can play a major role in disrupting this balance and subsequently, disrupt the body's immune response by cutting off critical communication between cells of the digestive tract and cells that trigger internal inflammation.

Beyond triggering negative immune system feedback, excess alcohol consumption is already scientifically proven to lead to higher rates of respiratory conditions: pneumonia, acute respiratory stress syndrome (ARDS), and cancers. In addition, alcohol misuse adds stress to organs, which may be targeted during a COVID-19 infection.



COVID-19 targets the respiratory system and adds further stress to organ function. It is of great concern that both of these issues are being worsened by excess alcohol consumption. People who are prone to binge drinking and alcohol misuse should be aware of these very serious interactions.



NEW RESEARCH FINDINGS

Researches have recently discovered that alcohol consumption has significantly increased since the beginning of the pandemic. By the end of the first week of social distancing measures, the nation experienced a 54% increase in alcoholic sales. This pattern of increased consumption has continued since. Alcohol consumption has increased almost 15% this year, compared to last year.

The increase of alcohol consumption also reflects an imbalance between demographics. While the average increase was 14%, women have seen increases of 17%. Even greater, the age group of 30-59 experiences an increase of 19%. The increase seems to cross race barriers, as well, with a greater impact on minority populations. Non-Hispanic white individuals have seen an increase in consumption of 10%, compared to the national average of 14%.

Researchers believe that this national increase in alcohol consumption has several different causes that may negatively add to one another. For example, an increase in pandemic-induced stress is negatively increased when combined with an inability to access traditional coping mechanisms, such as going to the gym or support networks. Stress and isolation also have contributed to an increase in mental health issues, which are known to make individuals more susceptible to alcohol misuse. Unfortunately, increased alcohol consumption may then contribute to worsened mental health over time.

While many factors may be out of individual control during the pandemic, research suggests that regulating stressful emotions and access to health professions may lessen the chances of alcohol misuse.