

What Happens To Your Brain When You Drink Alcohol?

By The Professionals At Robert Alexander Center

As per the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 85.6% of adults in America reported drinking alcohol at a point in their lifetime. Indeed, it isn't uncommon to drink a glass of wine now and then with dinner or at a social function. After-work beers with friends and cocktails on vacation are also popular with many, so alcohol consumption is undoubtedly part of America's social fabric. Although drinking occasionally is unlikely to cause significant health issues, moderate or heavy consumption has damaging effects on the human brain. Some of these consequences are short-term and easily noticeable, while some deficits occur over time and may not be as obvious.



Short-Term Effects Of Alcohol On The Brain

Dr. Maria Pagano, an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the Case Western Reserve University, believes that alcohol significantly alters the brain's neurotransmitter levels. Your brain's neurotransmitters send signals throughout the body and are instrumental in regulating emotion, behavior, and physical activity. Indeed, alcohol increases GABA activity, the brain's primary inhibitory neurotransmitter, and suppresses neuron activity. As such, drinkers will experience lapses in short-term memory, delayed reflexes, unsteady movement, and slurred speech.

Additionally, alcohol speeds up glutamate activity in the brain. Glutamate is the neurotransmitter responsible for controlling dopamine in your brain's reward center. As such, you might experience a fuzzy and warm feeling while drinking. Furthermore, alcohol clouds your judgment and lowers inhibitions. Therefore, drinkers are likelier to engage in risky behaviors like drunk driving and unprotected sex even when drunk for a short while. In addition, if you have a pre-existing mental health disorder like depression, taking in alcohol can worsen your symptoms and lead to mood swings.

Also, binge drinking affects the brain's cerebellum and cerebral cortex, the areas responsible for regulating balance and processing new information, respectively. Consequently, you might feel dizzy or stagger while walking, have double vision, and will struggle to pay attention to happenings around you. Additionally, your sensory uptake will be diminished, so you will be incapable of taking in new information.

What's more, you may experience blackouts due to alcohol affecting your brain's hippocampus region. **Drinking too much** and too fast is often the cause of loss of consciousness in the most extreme cases. However, experts are worried about the loss of consciousness because it is a sign of cell death. As such, multiple heavy drinking episodes can have long-term consequences for memory and learning.

Long-Term Effects Of Alcohol On The Brain

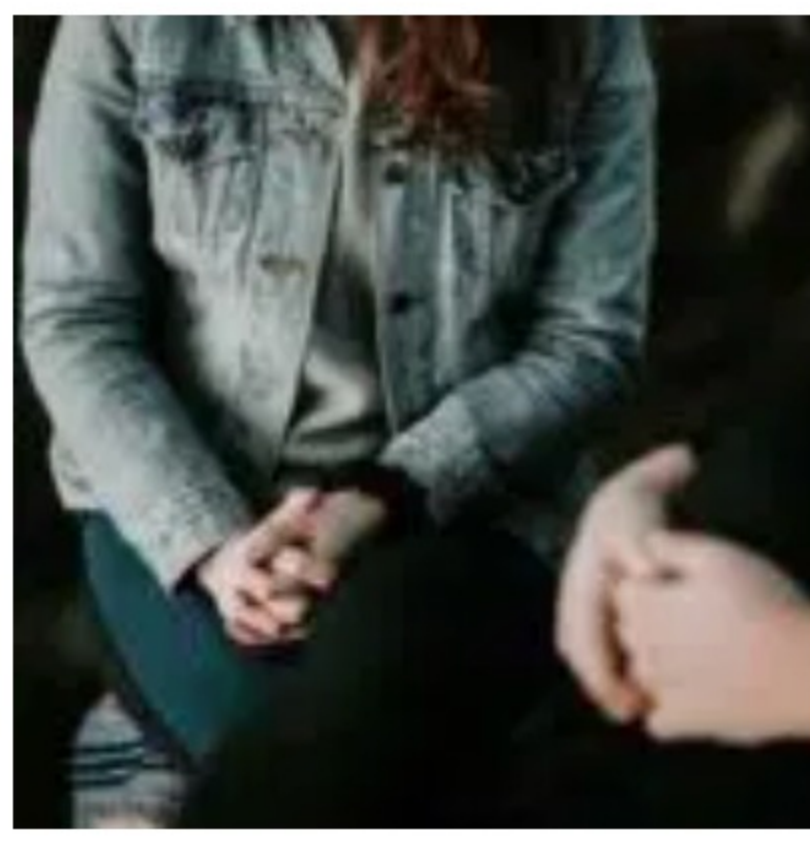
If you often wonder what happens to your brain when you use alcohol, you will likely acknowledge the reality of making poor decisions and possible embarrassment due to binge drinking. However, you may end up with more than consistent hangovers if heavy drinking becomes a habit.

A 2008 study published in the Archives of Neurology suggests that **prolonged heavy drinking** can shrink brain volume. The study discovered that individuals with more than 14 drinks weekly over two years had 1.6% smaller brains than non-drinkers. In addition, hastened memory loss in old age is also a possibility. If you are a man wondering what happens to your brain when you use alcohol, a 2014 study showed that men who took more than two and a half drinks daily experienced cognitive decline symptoms about six years earlier than non-drinkers, ex-drinkers, and light or moderate drinkers.

Also, regular and heavy drinkers may notice that alcohol has less of an effect on them than it used to. If you are a chronic drinker, the wiring of your brain's reward system can lose some of its normal functioning from being worn out. As such, you can build up a **tolerance to alcohol**, and the exact amounts of alcohol will no longer give you the satisfaction it used to. Therefore, you can alter your behaviors around alcohol, seeking it out even more often and relying on it to handle your negative feelings. However, this is a dangerous loop, so consider getting **help for alcohol addiction** to break out of it as soon as possible. If not, you might be stuck in a vicious cycle of drinking to feel good and ending in more drinking to avoid feeling bad, causing even more significant brain damage.

Lastly, "wet brain" is another possible long-term consequence of alcohol consumption on the brain. Wet brain is a form of dementia due to thiamine deficiency in your brain. Alcohol interferes with your body's thiamine absorption and hinders the enzyme that converts it for use in the body.

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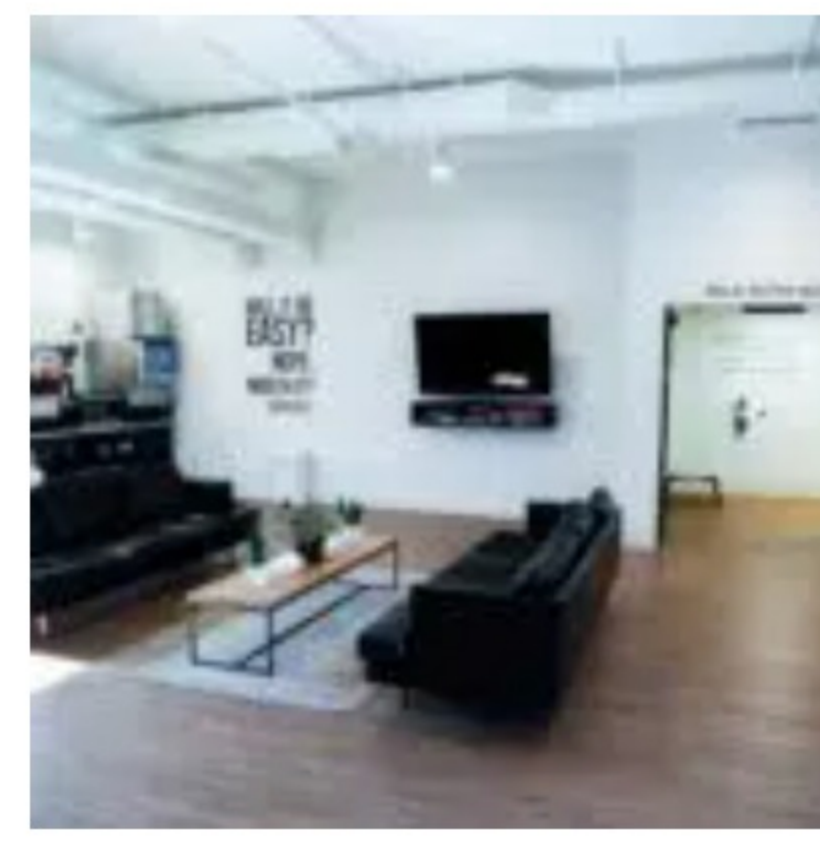
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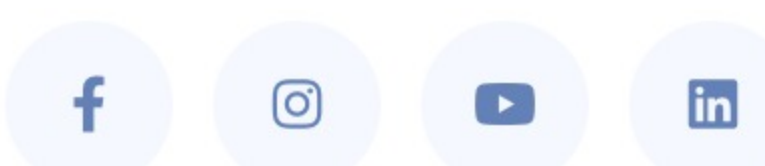
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