



News Alert

Northeast Community Challenge Coalition

Teen Girls' Drinking Linked to Breast Disease

Recent study finds that adolescent girls who regularly consume alcohol may be at greater risk for developing benign breast disease. According to research from the National Cancer Institute, risk of developing breast disease increases five-fold among women who drank alcohol six or seven days a week during their teens and early 20s . Benign breast disease is a known risk factor for breast cancer. These findings raise concern because alcohol intakes by college students has increased greatly in recent years.

In the study, girls were aged 9 to 15 when study began. They answered questionnaires from 1996 to 2001 and then again in 2003, 2005, 2007. A unique aspect of Berkley's study was that the girls assessed their drinking habits while they were teenagers, as opposed to adult women recalling their teenage drinking many years later.

Exactly how alcohol use during the teen years raises risk for benign breast cancer is not fully understood, but researchers speculate that alcohol use may increase levels of the hormone estrogen, which may foster development of benign lumps, bumps, and cysts.

“The breasts of young girls are very active and if you give them extra hormones or alcohol, then they can respond by creating lumps, bumps and things in the category of benign breast disease, and if you keep it going it can increase the risk of breast cancer,” says Marissa Weiss, MD, the president and founder of advocacy group brestcancer.org. “You are laying the foundation for your future breast health during adolescence. The habits you develop as an adolescent are likely to turn into lifelong habits, and we know that drinking in adult women is a risk factor for breast cancer,” says Weiss.

In conclusion “our study results give older girls and adolescence another reason to avoid alcohol,” said Berkey.

Source: The study appears in the Journal of Pediatrics. (2010)

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