

Lifewire: Study looks at high school alcohol abuse

by Ven Griva

Nearly half of all U.S. high school students admit to recently drinking alcohol illegally, and most of them were binge drinkers, says a government survey published on New Year's Day.

High school binge drinkers - defined as those consuming five or more drinks in a row - were more likely to have sex, fight, smoke or use drugs, the study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found. High school students who drank moderately, while less so, were also more likely than non-drinkers to take part in these risky behaviors.

Writing in the journal *Pediatrics*, the CDC team said it analyzed data from 15,214 high school students (aged 14-18) who completed the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Nationwide, the minimum drinking age is 21. Most teens leave high school by age 17, 18 or 19, years before they can drink legally.

CDC researchers found 45 percent of all high school students admitted having drunk alcohol in the past month. Of these, 64 percent were binge drinkers.

The report is a sobering reality check for parents who think alcohol consumption is a harmless rite of passage for teens. Regardless of whether they drank heavily or moderately, the report found that all high school drinkers did more poorly in school than non-drinkers.

"Our study clearly shows that it's not just that students drink alcohol, but how much they drink that most strongly affects whether they experience other health and social problems," said Dr. Jacqueline Miller of the CDC's Alcohol Team, who led the study.

The report noted that teen binge drinkers were:

- More than five times as likely as non-drinkers to be sexually active.

- More than 18 times as likely as non-drinkers to smoke cigarettes.

- More than four times as likely than non-drinkers to have been in a fistfight.

- Far more likely than non-drinkers to smoke marijuana.

- Far more likely than non-drinkers to attempt suicide.

The report found that high school drinkers who drank more moderately still were:

- More than twice as likely as non-drinkers to be sexually active.

- More than four times as likely as non-drinkers to smoke cigarettes.

- More than twice as likely as non-drinkers to have been in a fistfight.

HEADACHE STUDY

Women who regularly suffer headaches, especially migraines, are more likely to be depressed, feel tired and have other severe physical symptoms, says a study to be published Jan. 9 in Neurology.

The study included 1,032 women seen at headache clinics in five states. The women were divided into two groups. One group of 593 women reported episodic headaches, which was defined as fewer than 15 headaches per month. The other group of 439 women reported chronic headaches, more than 15 per month. Ninety percent of the women were diagnosed with migraines.

The study found:

- Women with chronic headaches were four times more likely than those with episodic headaches to report symptoms of major depression.

- Chronic headache sufferers were three times more likely to report low energy, trouble sleeping, nausea, dizziness and pain or problems during intercourse. They were also three times as likely to report pain in the stomach, back, arms, legs and joints.

- Among patients diagnosed with severely disabling migraines, the likelihood of major depression increased 32-fold if the patient also reported other severe symptoms.

"Painful physical symptoms may provoke or be a manifestation of major depression in women with chronic headache, and depression may heighten pain perception," said study author Dr. Gretchen Tietjen of the University of Toledo-Health Science Campus. "This relation between migraine and major depression suggests a common neurobiology."

Tietjen says studies are under way to test whether severe headaches, severe physical symptoms and major depression can be linked.

"Regardless of what's causing the link between migraine and depression, psychiatric disease such as depression complicates headache management and can lead to poorer outcomes for headache management," said Tietjen.

