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Drinking to an irregular heartbeat

The Star Malaysia · 11 Oct 2024 · 9

TOO much alcohol causes damage to your heart, even if you are young and fit, say the authors of a new study published in the European Heart Journal that adds yet another reason to keep drinking to a minimum.



Arrhythmia, or an irregular heartbeat, is a problem with the rate or rhythm of your heartbeat and can occur when people drink too much, according to the researchers in Germany.
They studied 200 young men and women who go out regularly and drink two or three alcoholic drinks.
All had peak blood alcohol levels of up to 2.5 per mille (i.e. 2.5g of alcohol per 1 litre of blood) during the study – a level that means you feel numb, confused, disoriented, and possibly sick, medics say.
The participants' heart rate were checked before, during and after the drinking session.
While the participants were drinking alcohol, they had an increasingly rapid pulse of more than 100 beats per minute.
A normal heart rate should be regular and between 60 and 100 beats a minute when you're resting, according to the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS).
In the group, 5% suffered worrying levels of arrhythmias – most of which occurred during their recovery phase.
Alcohol can profoundly interfere with the processes of the heart, the researchers say, in a study published as Germany celebrates Oktoberfest, a festival dedicated to beer.
"From a cardiological point of view, our study provides further evidence of the negative effect of acute excessive alcohol consumption on people's health," says Dr Moritz Sinner, a Munich-based cardiologist who co-led the study.
The long-term effects of alcohol-related arrhythmias on heart health are unknown, say the scientists.
But even if you only drink small amounts of alcohol regularly, this can trigger atrial fibrillation, even in healthy people with no previous illnesses, says a study from Hamburg University's heart and vascular centre from a few years ago.
Atrial fibrillation is an irregular and often very rapid heart rhythm, which increases the risk of stroke and other heart-related complications, the UK NHS says.