



Family History of Alcoholism May Affect adolescent Brains

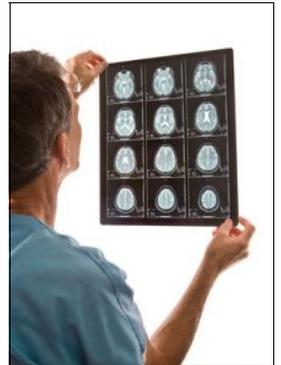
By Janice Wood, Associate Editor, reviewed by John M. Grohol, Psy D. from psychcentral.com (Below are excerpts from the full article)

A new study has found that the brains of adolescents with a family history of alcoholism respond differently while making risky decisions than the brains of other teens. Researchers at the Oregon Health & Science University discovered that two areas of the brain — the prefrontal cortex and cerebellum — demonstrated atypical activity while completing the same task than their peers with no family history of alcoholism.

"We know that a familial history of alcoholism is a significant risk factor for future alcohol abuse," said Bonnie J. Nagel, assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral neuroscience at Oregon Health & Science University. "We were interested in determining whether adolescents at heightened risk for alcohol use made more risky decisions during a laboratory task compared to their lower-risk peers."

The researchers also wanted to investigate risk factors in youth who had a family history of alcoholism (FHP), but were not drinking yet. "This is the first study to examine the neural substrates of risk-taking in FHP adolescents who are substance naïve," added Megan Herting, a PhD candidate in behavioral neuroscience at Oregon Health & Science University.

"A previous study looked at young adults who were drinkers, therefore, it is hard to say if the differences found were purely a pre-existing neural risk factor for alcohol use. Alcohol use may also differentially impact the brains of those with and without a family history of alcoholism. The current study is a very novel and important piece of work showing that the brain is doing something different during risky decision making in substance-naïve FHP adolescents."



The researchers recruited 31 youth — 18 FHP (12 males, 6 females) and 13 without a family history of alcoholism (FHN) (8 males, 5 females) — between the ages of 13 and 15. All had little to no alcohol involvement before their participation in the study.

"Differences in brain activity may impact the ability of FHP individuals to make good decisions in many contexts and, in particular, may facilitate poor decision-making in regards to alcohol use," she said. "Taken together with other studies on FHP youth, these results suggest that atypical brain structure and function exist prior to any substance use, and may contribute to an increased vulnerability for alcoholism in these individuals." The researchers believe these findings can help develop better prevention programs based on family risk factors.

"These findings may suggest a neurobiological marker that helps to explain how family history of alcoholism confers risk," said Nagel. "Furthermore, our research may aid clinicians who work with high-risk youth to develop effective prevention strategies for these adolescents to promote healthy decision-making."

Having a family history of alcoholism is just one of many factors involved in future alcohol abuse, the researchers note. "While having a family history of alcoholism may put one at greater risk for alcohol abuse, personality and behavioral risk factors are also important to consider," said Nagel. "The combination of genetic and environmental factors is very different for everyone, so some individuals may be at higher risk than others, and certainly there are genetic and environmental factors that can also protect against alcohol abuse. Future research will need to determine the relative influence of these traits on alcohol abuse risk to be able to design specific prevention strategies for different high-risk populations."

The results of the study will be published in the April 2012 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*.

Source: [Oregon Health & Science University](#)

Surveys Reveals Most Dangerous Nights For Teen Drivers By Cathryn J. Prince, THE HUB

With new, stiffer [penalties for drinking and driving](#) in place for 2012, and new rules for newly minted drivers in effect, *The Hub* thought it was time to take a look at what are considered most the most dangerous days, and nights, to drive for teenagers. The December 2011 report was conducted by the Liberty Mutual Insurance and Students Against Destructive Decisions Teen Driving study. It included some more obvious answers: New Year's and Fourth of July. However, the report also revealed some surprises: Prom Night came in nearly last. And there was also a "he said, she said" view on the dangers of mixing alcohol and drugs with driving: Females tend to be more assertive when it comes to asking drivers to put down the keys if they've been drinking. Liberty Mutual surveyed 2,300 teens in 11th and 12th grade. The report didn't address one important fact -- all those surveyed were underage and not legally allowed to drink in the first place. But that's for a different column. Of those teens surveyed, 49 percent said they believe New Year's Eve was the most dangerous time to be on the road. Yet, 10 percent of those same teens said they'd driven under the influence of alcohol or drugs on New Year's Eve. So what then about other so-called party nights such as the Super Bowl, the Fourth of July, and graduation? Well, the Fourth of July follows New Year's Eve as the holiday most teens consider as a road hazard, according to the report. Of those surveyed, 29 percent think it's a bad night to be on the road, and 8 percent of them drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Homecoming was near the bottom of the list with 11 percent of surveyed teens saying it was not a good time to be on the road. Still, 8 percent of those surveyed said they'd driven under the influence.

By now teen drivers, and adult drivers, know Connecticut stiffened the penalties for drunk driving. And the Department of Motor Vehicles is working to get the word out, including installing billboards (that look vaguely militaristic) saying Drive Sober Or Get Pulled Over. The state also operates under the Implied Consent Law. That means the law considers any person operating a motor vehicle as having given his or her consent to a test to determine blood alcohol concentration (BAC), or, at the very least to recite the alphabet backwards from the letter N.

Effective Jan. 1, drivers with a first time drunk driving offense must install an ignition interlock device on their vehicle for one year. Drivers can't start the car until they blow into the device, which works similar to a Breathalyzer. In addition, those with a first time DUI offense are subjected to a 45-day license suspension. Anyone convicted for a second DUI offense will have to install the interlock device for three years and they will have their license suspended for 45 days. Clearly this law doesn't address a person using someone else's car, or starting the car and literally driving while drinking alcohol or using drugs. But it's a start and shows the state is getting more serious about cracking down on DUIs. In Connecticut a driver is considered legally drunk if their BAC is .08 or higher. Those under 21 years of age, the age of those surveyed in the report, are considered legally intoxicated at a .02 BAC or higher, according to the DMV's website.

The Liberty Mutual/SADD report also showed something else; peer pressure works in a positive way. Most teen drivers said they wouldn't drink and drive, or get high and drive, if a passenger asked them not to. Eighty-seven percent of teen passengers said they are more comfortable asking a peer to stop driving after drinking, compared with 72 percent who said they would be okay asking a peer to not drive after using marijuana. The survey also showed that female passengers would confront drinking and driving more readily than boys for both alcohol and marijuana. In the survey 90 percent of the females said they'd ask for no drinking compared with 83 percent for marijuana. And 78 percent of boys would ask about drinking while 65 percent about pot.

Aside from making some interesting reading and perhaps dinner conversation, what does this report mean? Well, the good news is, teens are paying attention to the messages that it's unsafe to drive while under the influence. The bad news is, teens -- and adults -- still have a ways to go to practice what they know: alcohol and drugs don't belong behind the wheel.

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