

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2013. *Vital Signs: Binge Drinking Among Women and High School Girls—United States, 2011*



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Background

Recommending dietary *moderation* is likely one of the most significant challenges espoused by health experts when it comes to eating and drinking for optimal health. Indeed, too many calories can lead to obesity, too much salt to hypertension, too much vitamin A to birth defects, and so forth. Complications of nutritional toxicities and dietary imbalances have been understood and studied for decades, if not centuries, and issues related to alcoholic beverage overindulgence are universally recognized.

But were you aware that 1 in 8 US women is classified as a “binge drinker,” generally defined as consuming ≥ 4 drinks per occasion? In response to the growing recognition that many individuals who drink do not practice moderation in this regard, Healthy People 2020 recommends reducing the prevalence of binge drinking among adults and youths. To help track progress toward this goal, the CDC recently assessed binge-drinking behaviors nationwide among US females: a group at especially high risk of drinking-associated health complications such as unintentional injuries, violence, breast and other cancers, and unintended pregnancies. Their results are published in the January 8, 2013 issue of *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Reports* and summarized here.

Sources of data

Data used to characterize the burden of binge drinking among adolescent and adult US women were drawn from the 2011 national Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) and the 2011 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), respectively. The YRBS is a biennial national survey measuring the prevalence of myriad health-risk behaviors among US high school students living in all 50 states and Washington, DC. YRBS surveys are anonymous and self-administered, and responses from a total of 7536 subjects were used for this report. Current alcohol use among adolescents was defined as having had ≥ 1 alcoholic drink on ≥ 1 d during the 30 d before the survey; binge drinking was defined as having had ≥ 5 drinks “in a row” on ≥ 1 d during the 30 d before the survey.

The BRFSS is an annual telephone survey designed to collect information on leading health conditions and health-risk behaviors in noninstitutionalized US adults 18 y of age and older; data from 278,234 women were included in the CDC’s analysis. Binge drinking was defined as consuming ≥ 4 alcoholic drinks per occasion during the past 30 d. Binge “frequency” was defined as the number of binge-drinking episodes during the past 30 d, whereas binge-drinking “intensity” was defined as the average number of drinks consumed during the past 30 d among binge drinkers.

Selected results

The CDC’s analyses revealed that in 2011, 37.9% of high school girls drank alcohol and that 19.8% of the girls could be classified as binge drinkers. Drinking (and binge drinking) progressively increased from 30.3 (13.0)% of high school freshmen to 45.4 (27.0)% of high school seniors. By their senior year, binge drinking was reported by 61.7% of teens who drank. The highest prevalence of binge drinking was recorded among Hispanic girls (22.4%), followed by white, non-Hispanic girls (21.7%); black, non-Hispanic teens had the lowest prevalence (10.3%). Teens who were binge drinkers experienced an average of 3.6 alcoholic binges per month (almost 1 per week), with 6.4 drinks being the average largest number of drinks consumed each time the girls drank.

In 2011, the prevalence of binge drinking among women was 12.5%. Women who reported binge drinking experienced 3.2 episodes per month with 5.7 drinks per binge. This behavior gradually decreased with age from 24.4% of women between 18 and 24 y to 2.5% at 65 y and older. Binge drinking increased with education and income, with the highest levels among college graduates (14.1%) and those with annual incomes $\geq \$75,000$ (16%). Interestingly, however, binge-drinking women with less than a high school education and those with incomes $< \$25,000$ reported some of the highest numbers of bingeing episodes (frequency of 3.4 binges/month) and number of drinks consumed during their binges (intensity: 6.0 drinks/episode).

Concluding comments and recommended steps

The authors concluded that “results of this report indicate that in 2011, binge drinking was common among US adult women, and women who binge drank tended to do so frequently and intensively, placing themselves and others at a greater risk for alcohol-attributable harms.” They also point out that, because the BRFSS and YRBS data are self-reported, the prevalence, frequency, and intensity of binge drinking reported here are probably lower than actual values. In addition, because only teens enrolled in school and noninstitutionalized adults were included, these data do not reflect habits of high-school dropouts or college

students, 2 groups that probably have relatively high propensities toward alcohol consumption.

Finally, the authors acknowledge the need to monitor binge drinking routinely among females, better clarify the personal and public health impacts of this behavior, and continue to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies used to curtail it.

Clearly, we have a long way to go before the common-sense, alcohol-related recommendations related to moderation put forth in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans [e.g., If you choose to drink, do so in moderation (defined

as up to 1 drink a day for women or 2 for men.)] are realized by the general population, including teenage and adult women.

For more information

Free copies of this report are available at [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6201a3.htm?s_cid = mm6201a3_w](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6201a3.htm?s_cid=mm6201a3_w). Additional information about binge drinking among women and girls, including a guide to who is at risk and what can be done can be found at <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/BingeDrinkingFemale/index.html>.