

TEENAGE BRAINS AND ALCOHOL DON'T MIX

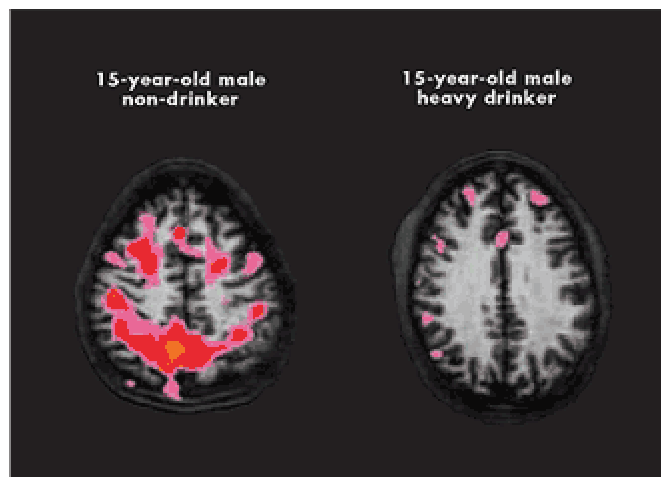


Teenage brains are “under construction”.

We used to think that the brain’s key development was finished within the first few years of life but science has shown that important brain regions continue to undergo “fine-tuning” at least into a person’s twenties. And alcohol might interfere with that complex brain development.

Scientists studied young people who had abused alcohol as teenagers – binge-drinkers (having 4 or 5 drinks in one sitting) or regular heavy drinkers.

They found that alcohol abuse during teen years might decrease the size of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that controls learning and memory. It can also damage the section of the brain behind the forehead – the part that plays an important role in judgement, decision-making, and impulse control. And the effects may be irreversible.



SOURCE: SUSAN TAPERT, PHD, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

These brain images show how alcohol may harm teen mental function.

On the left, the brain of a young non-drinker. On the right, the brain of a 15-year-old with an alcohol problem.

Both were given the same memory task.

The image on the right shows poor brain activity – indicated by the lack of pink and red colouring.

The American Medical Association stated, “While many believe that underage drinking is an inevitable ‘rite of passage’ that adolescents can easily recover from because their bodies are more resilient, the opposite is true.”

To find out more about the study:

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/print/9416.html>.