Women experience more hangovers than men, a study shows. It also indicates that we should eat while we drink and that we readily drink more than the authorities recommend.

If you’ve ever said your girlfriend is more girlish than normal and suffers more than a man the day after a drinking binge, you’re probably right.

A study of the drinking habits of 76,000 Danes shows that women have hangovers more often than men after having had more than five alcoholic drinks in an evening.

A hangover is a collective term for sensations such as tiredness, thirst, headache, nausea, lack of appetite, dizziness, stomach-ache, vomiting and palpitations – and women report being affected worse by these sensations than men do.

A total of 12.6 percent of women surveyed in the study say they ‘almost always’ or ‘always’ have a hangover after having more than five drinks at a party. The figure for men is 6.1 percent.

The figures derive from a survey conducted by the National Institute of Public Health at the University of Southern Denmark among the citizens of 13 municipalities. In the survey, people were asked about their habits in terms of diet, smoking, alcohol and exercise, as well as their state of health.

Eat, drink and be merry

The study shows that we get hangovers no matter whether we are used to drinking or drink only rarely. But eating while drinking does seem to have a beneficial effect.

Among women who drank without eating, 18 percent woke up with at least four symptoms of being hung over. But only 9 percent of women who drank and ate were hung over the following day.

The picture for men was similar: 11 percent of men who drank without eating were hung over the following day, while only 4 percent had hangover symptoms after eating and drinking.

The report states that the more alcohol drunk while eating, the fewer the hangover symptoms reported by both men and women.

Only one in six will stop

The survey also shows that most Danes are quite happy ignoring the Danish National Board of Health’s recommendations about drinking. These state that men should not have more than 21 alcoholic drinks a week, and women no more than 14 drinks – and that no-one should have more than five drinks at any one time.

Among those who ignore the recommendations (and thus have an alcohol consumption the National Board
of Health terms ‘problematic’), only 15 percent indicate that they would drink less. The figure is just 5 percent among the 18-24-year-olds.

The survey is comprehensive but not completely representative: women are over-represented, while the youngest men are under-represented. More people with a higher education took part in the survey than their actual share of the population.

One of the intentions with the survey was to gather so much data that it can form the basis for new health research.

The researchers behind the study hope that, in time, alcohol-related questions in such surveys can show whether a hangover is an indicator for how sensitive the body is towards alcohol, and whether experiencing a hangover can tell us anything about the risk of developing diseases that are related to drinking.

Read the article in Danish at videnskab.dk [8]

Fact box

The survey states: “It is said that colourless alcohol such as vodka makes you less hung over than coloured alcohol such as whisky.”

On the other hand, smoking as a rule makes you more hung over because of the toxic substances in the smoke and because the interplay between alcohol and nicotine makes us drink more, according to the survey.

Doctors get hangovers from night work [11]

Thomas Hoffmann [12]
Michael de Laine

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