



Don't risk a hangover for life

“If you stop drinking your chances of recovery are good”

Despite a constant barrage of media health advice, many people risk ending up with a hangover for life by ignoring the warnings against excessive alcohol consumption.

In the worst case scenario, ten years of social drinking can lead to impairment of memory and mental processing ability so that a 35-year-old is just able to fulfil his or her work duties.

These findings keep La Trobe University's Psychological Science Clinic director, Martin Jackson on the media trail, pushing for

constraints on advertising, calling for the government to run more health alerts.

Recently, as the chair of Arbias – Australia's only organisation treating alcohol related brain damage – he authorised a hard-hitting campaign which warned that two million Australians risk permanent brain damage because of their drinking behaviour.

The Hangover for Life campaign released new Roy Morgan research revealing that 70 per cent of men and 59 per cent of women still did not know safe limits – six standard drinks a day for men and three for women.

Teenage boys were particularly optimistic, believing that brain damage would only result if they drank a slab a day over eight years or more.

Jackson is particularly sceptical about advertising by the industry. Even the oft-

quoted myth that two glasses of red wine a day help guard against heart disease could be just that – a myth based on suspect research.

A recent re-analysis of the data on which the recommendations are based showed that many of the non-drinkers in the control group were actually heavy drinkers who had given up.

The fact that they had more heart disease than those who drank two glasses a day was likely to be a feature of their past drinking history rather than evidence for the benefits of the antioxidants in red.

“Everything is contentious when it comes to alcohol,” Jackson says.

“The government has put in \$125 million to stop illicit drug use but only \$25 million for alcohol.”

The problem is that in the early stages of brain damage the irritability and anger associated with symptoms

could appear to be work-related issues.

“They look very similar,” Jackson says.

“If you are drinking more than six drinks a day and are concerned about your memory go and get assessed. If you stop drinking your chances of recovery are good.”

It is easy to slip into unsafe drinking practices, Jackson says. A bottle of wine with dinner will take you over the safety limit.

Australian beverages are higher in alcohol content than their overseas equivalents: beer has five per cent alcohol compared to two per cent in England and wine 11 per cent here compared to 3-4 per cent in Italy.

Alcohol has a direct toxic effect on the body, burning away the white matter of the brain, he says.



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