

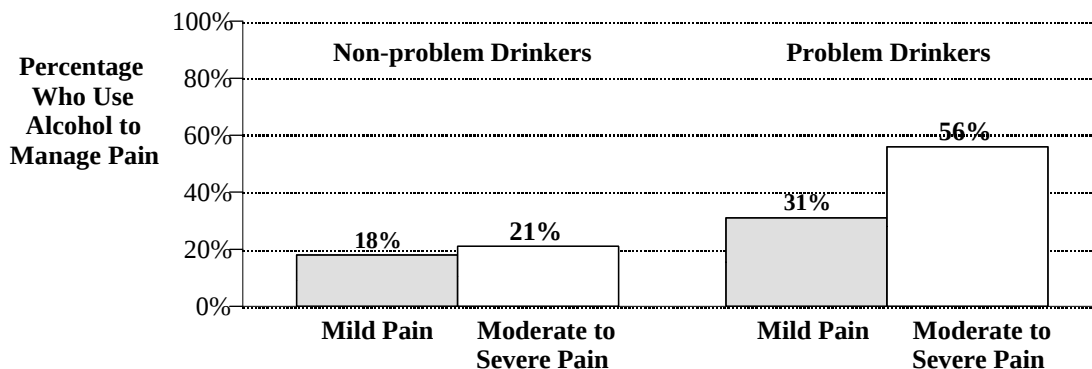
A Weekly FAX from the Center for Substance Abuse Research

University of Maryland, College Park

***Older Adults With Drinking Problems More Likely to
Use Alcohol to Manage Physical Pain***

Problem drinkers are considerably more likely than persons without drinking problems to manage their physical pain with alcohol, according to results from the first study of pain and alcohol use by older adults ages 55 to 65 years old.* More than one-third (38%) of male and female problem drinkers** reported using alcohol to manage pain in the past month, compared to 15% of male and 13% of female non-problem drinkers. While higher levels of pain were associated with increased use of alcohol for pain management among all drinkers, the effect was more pronounced for problem drinkers. The use of alcohol to treat pain among men who were non-problem drinkers increased only slightly from 18% among those with mild pain to 21% among those with moderate to severe pain. Among problem drinkers, however, the use of alcohol to manage pain increased from 31% among those with mild pain to 56% among those with moderate to severe pain (see figure below). Similar results were found for women. According to the authors, these results “highlight the importance of monitoring the drinking behavior of older patients who present with pain complaints, especially patients who have pre-existing problems with alcohol” (p. 777).

Use of Alcohol to Manage Pain Among Male Non-Problem and Problem
Drinkers, Ages 55 to 65 Years**
(N=247)



*The initial sample was drawn from individuals who had out-patient contact with one of two large medical health-care facilities located in one geographic region of the U.S. Data on pain were collected from a subsample of the original study as part of a follow-up survey conducted seven years later. The total N for this study was 401 male and female drinkers.

**Problem drinkers were defined as those individuals who had one or more drinking problems, as assessed with the Drinking Problems Index (DPI). The DPI is a self-report measure of general problems with drinking, adverse consequences resulting from excessive drinking, and alcohol dependence or withdrawal symptoms

SOURCE: Adapted by CESAR from Brennan P.L., Schutte K.K., Moos R.H. “Pain and Use of Alcohol to Manage Pain: Prevalence and 3-Year Outcomes Among Older Problem and Non-Problem Drinkers,” *Addiction* 100(6):777-786. For more information, contact Penny Brennan at penny.brennan@med.va.gov.

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