

## Stress and Alcohol

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Stress can be seen from two perspectives. There is the subjective feeling of the individual that is experiencing the stress and the underlying physiological and psychological changes that are going on inside that persons body. From a subjective perspective consuming alcohol is often seen as a way to reduce stress but some studies have shown that the stress responses in the body are in fact increased when alcohol is taken. This article will discuss stress and the affect that alcohol has on the body.

Most people have 'let off a bit of steam' on Friday night at the end of a long working week. Quite often this involves drinking alcohol. Alcohol is thought to reduce inhibitions and generally allow the person to be themselves. This is seen as a good way to relieve stress and take the persons mind off troubles at work or problems with relationships. But drinking too much alcohol or doing it too frequently is believed to actually increase the bodies responses to stress.

The body responds to a perceived stressor by releasing hormones into the body. These hormones are adrenaline and cortisol. They give the body a boost of energy and mobilize the body's immune, nervous and cardiovascular systems for increased activity. The aim is to get the body to adapt to a situation, that could be physical, like an illness or wound, or could be mental like a bout of depression or anxiety.

After the body perceives that the stressor has been dealt with, the hormones are reduced and the body goes back to it's normal state. This is known as homeostasis. This is the goal of the multitude of systems, specifically the nervous system, that are responsible for running the the body.

When there is confusion in the body as to when to return to homeostasis, the secretion of adrenaline and cortisol continue. If this continues for any length of time, the metabolism of the body can change, the cardiovascular system can be overworked and prone to

illness and the immune system can become confused and start acting abnormally or sluggishly. All this is bad news for the individual involved and can lead to health problems.

Tests on animals and humans have shown that small doses of alcohol can reduce the stress response. This may fit in with the idea of a glass of red wine with a meal being good for you. Tests on humans have shown that a small dose will improve the ability to solve a complex problem.

However too much alcohol is shown to increase the stress response. This is especially the case with the hormone adrenaline. Too much alcohol will increase the amount of adrenaline secreted into the body. Over time this will be bad for the body and too much alcohol may diminish a persons ability to function normally and in control.

It seems that, like most things, alcohol is fine in moderation but can be a source of more stress if too much is consumed than a way to reduce stress.

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/guide/>

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