

Health scare of the week

Booze and the brain

Middle-aged men who drink more than two beers or the equivalent amount of alcohol a day speed up their memory loss by six years, reports *The Guardian* (U.K.). Researchers at University College London studied the drinking habits of about 5,000 men and 2,000 women over 10 years. When the participants turned 56, they began taking tests of their memory, reasoning, and organizational abilities. Men who consumed an average of 2.5 drinks per day showed signs of memory loss a lot sooner than men who didn't drink or men who were light to moderate drinkers. That effect held even after researchers controlled for memory-affecting factors such as diet, exercise habits, and occupation. Light drinkers did not show the declines. "There is no need to be an alcoholic to see a detrimental effect of heavy alcohol consumption on cognition," said study author Séverine Sabia. Strangely, the researchers didn't find similar, drinking-related memory loss in women, although women who drank a lot did show deficits in organization and planning skills.