



drink dangers

The risk of benign breast disease offers one more reason why young women shouldn't drink as much as they do

BY DR. ART HISTER



Young women are drinking way more alcohol (and even worse, binge-drinking far more) than in the past

A terrific study that followed nearly 7,000 young women for a decade from their teens into their 20s has concluded that young men haven't a clue when it comes to figuring out young women.

Hey, just kidding, because old men haven't a clue what women want or why they do what they do, either.

Actually, the aforementioned study was about

alcohol intake and not about the parallel planets men and women inhabit. It concluded that the more alcohol a young woman drinks as a teenager, the greater her chance of being diagnosed with benign breast disease (BBD) in her 20s.

BBD is an umbrella term for all those non-malignant breast lumps and swellings and thickenings that some women develop.

This finding is of concern

for at least three very important reasons:

1. We don't have any really good treatment or therapies for either the symptoms of BBD (pain and tenderness) or for the lumps themselves.

2. Way too many benign lumps must be investigated to prove that they're not malignant, and until the results come back declaring a particular lump to be benign, that woman has to deal with the uncertainty and fear of not knowing if she has breast cancer, not to

• Young women weigh more on average than young women used to weigh, with a much greater percentage of them being obese these days, and obesity raises the risk of breast cancer;

• Young women are also much more sedentary than ever, and exercise from a young age on is one of the few factors that we know actually lower the risk of breast cancer.

In other words, if current trends — more alcohol, more weight, less exercise

mention the anxiety about what to do when the next worrying lump occurs.

3. Studies have linked BBD to a higher risk of future breast cancer.

So, here are the worrisome things happening out there now to young women and which should be a concern to everyone:

• Surveys indicate that young women are drinking way more alcohol (and even worse, binge-drinking far more) than in the past, and drinking alcohol raises the risk of both BBD and breast cancer (the more alcohol a woman drinks over her lifetime, the higher her risk of breast cancer — period);

— continue, we may see a huge uptick in breast cancer diagnoses in the not-too-distant future.

Bottom line: if they're concerned about lowering their risk of breast cancer, women — of any age — should be careful about how much alcohol they consume.

Thing is, this advice is coming from a male (honest, I really am, and if you doubt me, I can show you my collection of hockey cards and my Jean Béliveau shirt), so I'm not sure if I've written this in a way that any woman will relate to. ■

Dr. Art Hister is a medical writer and health analyst for Global TV and Corus Radio.