

Spotlight

By Anne Forde

Alcohol Consumption and Glioblastoma

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Glioblastoma is an aggressive disease and the causes of it are poorly understood. Although alcohol is a known carcinogen, its influence on glioma risk is not clear from past studies. Here, the authors took advantage of the Melbourne Collaborative Cohort Study – an Australian study set up in the early 1990s to investigate the role of diet and other lifestyle factors in diseases – to examine whether alcohol consumption is linked to glioma risk.

Nearly 40,000 participants were asked a series of questions relating to alcohol consumption at baseline interview and were followed up for an average of 15 years. Cases of glioblastoma were ascertained by record linkage to state cancer registries. The authors identified 67 cases of invasive glioblastoma. Alcohol was positively associated with the risk of glioblastoma. A dose--response relationship was observed. This translated as a 16% increase in relative risk for each additional 10g alcohol consumed each day (p for linear trend =0.007). Participants drinking 40g alcohol or more a day had up to a 3-fold higher risk.

The authors concede that this study measured average alcohol consumption at the baseline interview and not the cumulative consumption. However, the increased risk is based on prospective studies with an almost complete follow-up rate. These findings warrant further study and offer an important insight into the risk factors for this aggressive brain tumor.