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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT | 01 February 2023

Pill for a skin disease also curbs excessive drinking

The drug apremilast reduces alcohol intake in mice bred to imbibe to excess and in humans with alcohol-use disorder.



People who took a drug normally used for the skin disease psoriasis drank less alcohol over an 11-day period than those who took a placebo. Credit: JoeFox Liverpool/Radharc Images/Alamy

A repurposed drug suppressed alcohol consumption in people who drink excessively¹.

The medicine, apremilast, is licensed by US regulators to treat the skin disease psoriasis. Apremilast works by inhibiting an enzyme that is linked to alcohol dependence, prompting Kolter Grigsby at the Oregon Health & Science University in Portland and his colleagues to try repurposing the drug to treat excessive alcohol consumption.

After the researchers injected apremilast into mice that were bred to drink heavily, they noticed that the rodents did not binge drink as much as animals that received a placebo, and also had lower blood alcohol levels. They found that activity in the nucleus accumbens, a brain region involved in controlling alcohol intake, increased in mice that received apremilast compared with those that didn't.

Adults with alcohol-use disorder who took the drug daily had fewer drinks a day over an 11-day period than those who took a placebo. If further studies confirm these results, apremilast could be a treatment for alcohol-use disorders, the authors conclude.

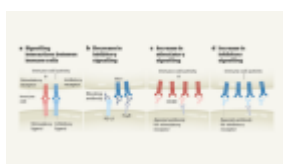
doi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-023-00233-8>

References

1. Grigsby, K. B. *et al.* *J. Clin. Invest.* <https://doi.org/10.1172/JCI159103> (2023).

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