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## How your favourite tippie could be changing the bacteria in your mouth... and it's not good news

28 June 2018

Just one alcoholic drink a day changes the balance of bacteria in the mouth and can lead to a range of diseases from **tooth decay** to cancer, a new study has revealed.

Researchers looking at the effects of alcohol on oral health discovered drinking habits influence the types of bacteria that reside the mouth, with higher numbers of so-called 'bad bacteria' found in those who consume **alcohol** daily.

Scientists tested saliva samples from more than 1,000 adults and found that, compared to non-drinkers, those who had one or more alcoholic drinks per day saw a reduction of healthy bacteria in the mouth, with a significant increase of harmful bacteria also detected.

Such changes could contribute to alcohol-related diseases such as **gum disease**, tooth decay, head and neck cancer, and digestive tract cancers.

The Oral Health Foundation wants to raise awareness about the dangers of alcohol and the impact that regular consumption can have on the mouth and overall health.

Dr Nigel Carter OBE, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, says: "There are hundreds of different types of

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bacteria in the mouth and they all play a highly significant role in a person's wellbeing. These bacteria are finely balanced and important for maintaining everything from the immune system and how the body deals with pollution in the environment, to protecting the teeth and gums and aiding with digestion after eating and drinking.

"The bacterial imbalance from drinking alcohol can cause serious problems in the mouth, such as gum disease, as well as increase the risk of head and neck cancer and heart disease."

The study also found the type of alcohol consumed also affects for the type bacteria in the mouth, with researchers testing wine, beers and spirits.

They found that wine drinkers produce more bacteria responsible for gum disease when compared to non-drinkers while those who consume beer produce an increase in bacteria that are linked to dental decay.

Researchers were able to show that alcohol consumption is associated with decreased abundance of Lactobacillales, a bacterium beneficial to oral health by reducing the risk of tooth decay. They also found that alcohol suppresses the growth of pathogens that can help reduce gum inflammation.

"A number of high profile studies have previously pointed to the dangers around drinking alcohol to excess but this research offers an additional cause for concern," adds Dr Carter.

"It is therefore important to be aware of the effects that even moderate alcohol consumption can have on oral and overall health, if drinking is sustained over a prolonged period of time.

"The best way for somebody to protect themselves from alcohol-related disease is to drink moderately, both in volume and frequency.

"It is also especially important that before bed, teeth are brushed correctly after drinking alcohol. Don't allow the bad bacteria to build up overnight.

"By giving the mouth a good clean last thing at night, bacteria in the saliva can be neutralised and help prevent any unwanted oral health or general health problems."

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## Mouth Cancer Action Month

Mouth Cancer Action Month takes place in November and is an annual campaign to raise awareness of the signs, symptoms and causes of mouth cancer in order to try and save lives.

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