The Dangers of Driving after Restricted Sleep and Moderate Alcohol Intake

In a recent study, combining moderate alcohol consumption (within legal limits for driving) and moderate sleep restriction led to greater drowsiness and increased deficits in attention, compared with either sleep restriction or alcohol intake alone.

The synergistic effects lasted between 2 and 3 hours. Also, peak impairment occurred not at peak alcohol levels but 30 to 60 minutes after, despite receiving rest intervals in between testing.

The findings suggest that individuals who have previously had inadequate sleep should refrain from performing safety critical tasks for several hours after the consumption of alcohol, even when their breath alcohol content is lower than that required by law. As performance impairment is still apparent with frequent breaks, breaks without sleep should not be seen as safety measures to mitigate impairment.

"Many individuals may make a decision to drive based on the amount of alcohol consumed and the time since consumption. Our data suggest this represents an unperceived risk following inadequate sleep, since performance impairment remains many hours after alcohol was consumed," said Dr. Clare Anderson, co-author of the Human Psychopharmacology study.

Additional Information


About Journal

Human Psychopharmacology: Clinical and Experimental provides a forum for the evaluation of clinical and experimental research on both new and established psychotropic medicines. Experimental studies of other centrally active drugs, including herbal products, in clinical, social and psychological contexts, as well as clinical/scientific papers on drugs of abuse and drug dependency will also be considered. While the primary purpose of the Journal is to publish the results of clinical research, the results of animal studies relevant to human psychopharmacology are welcome.

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