

## **Prospective memory loss linked to teenage alcohol abuse**

John Ives

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Heavy drinking and smoking as teenagers may damage the ability to remember future tasks, according to new research.

The findings are drawn from two studies exploring teenagers' capacity for prospective memory - the ability to remember something you had intended to do in the future, such as returning a phone call or paying a bill on time.

In one study, 108 students aged 16 to 19 years old were asked to report the number of times that prospective memory had failed them recently. Teenagers who were "excessive" alcohol users were significantly less likely to remember future tasks, the researchers found.

A second study found that teenage smokers reported more memory lapses in general than non-smokers, and also reported fewer items in a prospective memory test.

The findings are being presented today at the British Psychology Society's annual conference at the University of York.

The society said that although evidence exists suggesting alcohol abuse has a detrimental effect on memory for past events, little was known before now about its impact on prospective memory.

Thomas Heffernan of the University of Northumbria, who led the research, said: "The teenage years are important for structural and functional development of the brain.

"If our findings are confirmed, they suggest that heavy drinking and smoking in the teenage years may impede this important development. This may lead to greater problems with memory later in life."

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