

# research

## Drinkers Deprive Themselves of Nutrition

By Mark Claesgens

Moderate and heavy drinkers may be depriving themselves of some nutrients, according to a Washington State University food scientist who recently completed a study of 179 middle-class men.

The study found that the nutritional quality of the men's diets dropped as alcohol consumption increased. Intake of vitamin A, vitamin C and thiamin also fell below recommended levels.

Those who drank the most -- more than 1.25 ounces of alcohol a day, or better than 2.5 drinks (wine, beer or mixed beverages) -- ate less food and skipped meals. Moderate drinkers also ate less.

The research, conducted by Dr. Val Hillers, was published in the February issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Hillers said drinkers apparently substituted calories in alcohol for food calories, because she found no correlation between alcohol consumption and weight.

Although consumption of protein, iron and fiber also decreased among moderate and heavy drinkers, Hillers said they remained above nationally recommended levels.

Hillers' study suggests that the body retains its normal weight and feels satisfied when its calorie needs are met, even if the calorie source is alcohol instead of food. Since the need

for calories prompts hunger, the heavy drinker doesn't feel hungry, and consequently doesn't consume food, which contains necessary nutrients.

Vitamin pills and other food supplements were not substituted for skipped meals. Even if the subjects had used vitamins, the pills wouldn't be adequate, she said, because they do not provide fiber and other nutrients missing from the drinker's diet, such as protein and trace minerals.

Unlike past studies, Hillers compared diet and alcohol for a range of drinking habits. Her subjects ranged from men who had less than a drink a day to those who were alcoholics. Many previous studies concentrated only on heavy drinkers and alcoholics.

Hillers' study group was divided into four categories: 51 randomly selected undergraduate WSU students, 46 non-faculty WSU employees, 35 men sentenced to attend court-referred alcohol school in nearby counties and 47 men receiving in-patient treatment for alcoholism.

The diets for Hillers' subjects were recorded from daily recall by the subjects of what they had consumed in the previous 24 hours. A set of 33 blood tests also was given to each to determine health status.

The subjects were divided into three groups based on their average daily alcohol consumption. The lowest level was 0.28 ounces or less, the middle from 0.28 to 1.25 and the highest from 1.25 or more.



Val Hillers