

BORG Drinking

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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Gallon jugs are oftentimes used for daily necessities like milk and water. But a new trend on social media could be a mixture for disaster.

Blackout rage gallon, or “BORG” drinking, is the newest TikTok take on binge drinking. College students can be seen on social media mixing alcohol, water, sweet flavorings and hangover remedies like Pedialyte. But while the consumers think water and electrolytes might protect them from hangovers, it didn’t protect some students from ending up in the hospital.

In Amherst, Massachusetts – home of UMass Amherst – the local fire department handled nearly 30 ambulance transport requests due to significant alcohol intoxication.

Deepak Nair, MD, a neurologist with OSF HealthCare Illinois Neurological Institute, says blacking out from drinking is very harmful.

“High quantities of alcohol can cause direct damage to the brain,” says Dr. Nair. “In single settings of drinking where you’re having enough alcohol to blackout, the reason you’re blacking out is because there’s a toxic effect of that alcohol on the brain.”

Dr. Nair says binge drinking is something “fairly unique” to American culture. But he also calls it the most risky form of drinking.

“We know it’s dangerous to both the nervous system and the brain, but also in terms of other long-term health effects,” Dr. Nair says. “Even those who have stopped engaging in binge drinking, there are long-term lingering effects. Everything from mild cognitive impairment that’s permanent, to more severe forms of what are called ‘alcoholic Wernicke encephalopathy’ where specific parts of the brain are being damaged permanently. This can cause permanent disability.”

So what about this new form of binge drinking? Does diluting the alcohol with water and electrolytes provide any benefits at all? Dr. Nair says a basic chemistry class will give you the answer.

“All you’re doing is slightly diluting the amount of alcohol. But you’re still talking about a very high percentage of alcohol by volume, and a very high overall volume of alcoholic liquid. That’s not a good way to think about it,” Dr. Nair says.

In the short term, blacking out from alcohol may just cause you to not be able to remember the night before. But Dr. Nair says continued binge drinking and blacking out can cause your memory, in general, to worsen.

“High quantities of alcohol have a tendency to impact the memory centers of our brain. When those parts of the brain are damaged, it can permanently impair our ability to store memories. At the end stage when we meet patients like this, not only can they not store new memories and recall memories effectively, their brain starts to make up details about their own life,” Dr. Nair adds.

Dr. Nair says this is called Korsakoff psychosis, which is a later stage complication of persistent Wernicke encephalopathy. He says this brain disorder is incredibly disabling, and alcohol abuse contributes to this problem.