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Higher Alcohol Consumption Leads to Greater Loss of Muscle Tissue in Postmenopausal Women

New study links drinking alcohol to sarcopenia

CLEVELAND, Ohio (June 7, 2017)—If you feel as though you can't do as much physically as you've gotten older, there may be a reason. Both aging and menopause are known to affect sarcopenia, which is a loss of muscle mass and strength, which in turn affects balance, gait, and overall ability to perform tasks of daily living. A new study is one of the first to link alcohol consumption with a higher prevalence of sarcopenia in postmenopausal women. The study outcomes are being published online today in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS).

Previous studies of postmenopausal women have suggested the beneficial effect of estrogen therapy on muscle mass and function. Because of this, it is believed that postmenopausal women are more vulnerable to sarcopenia. Although alcohol is known to inhibit skeletal muscle protein synthesis, few studies have examined the relationship between sarcopenia and alcohol-drinking patterns.

The Korean-based study included 2,373 postmenopausal women (mean age, 62.4 y), 8.2% of whom were identified as having sarcopenia. Participants were categorized into three groups according to alcohol-drinking patterns, as assessed by the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test questionnaire.

Study results published in the article "Associations between high-risk alcohol consumption and sarcopenia among postmenopausal women" show that the prevalence of sarcopenia was found to be nearly four times greater for the high-risk, alcohol-drinking group than the low-risk group. High-risk drinking was determined by the self-reporting of quantity and frequency of alcohol consumption, combined with a perceived lack of control over drinking, as well as blackouts and other injuries related to drinking. Women in the high-risk, alcohol-drinking group were more likely to be current smokers and have worse blood pressure and total cholesterol. They were also significantly younger.

"Preclinical studies suggest a possible benefit of estrogen therapy when combined with exercise to increase strength and performance and to prevent the loss of muscle mass, but the role of estrogen in muscle mass is not yet clear for postmenopausal women," says Dr. JoAnn Pinkerton, executive director of NAMS. "With this study suggesting that more muscle loss leads to sarcopenia and other studies suggesting that even one drink of alcohol may increase the risk of breast cancer, postmenopausal women should limit their alcohol intake."

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Founded in 1989, The North American Menopause Society (NAMS) is North America's leading nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting the health and quality of life of all women during midlife and beyond through an understanding of menopause and healthy aging. Its multidisciplinary membership of 2,000 leaders in the field—including clinical and basic science experts from medicine, nursing, sociology, psychology, nutrition, anthropology, epidemiology, pharmacy, and education—makes NAMS uniquely qualified to serve as the definitive resource for health professionals and the public for accurate, unbiased information about menopause and healthy aging. To learn more about NAMS, visit www.menopause.org.