vinetur

Study Finds Eating Disorder Patients Face Higher Risk of Later Alcohol Disorders

Researchers who analyzed large health record datasets said routine screening could catch both conditions earlier.

Monday, October 5, 2026



People treated for an eating disorder may face a higher risk of developing alcohol-related problems later, according to a study led by Bournemouth University that researchers said points to a gap in routine health care screening.

The study, published in the journal Addiction, examined large health record datasets to identify patterns between eating disorders and alcohol use disorders. The researchers said the overlap appears to be significant enough that many patients could benefit from being checked for both conditions during treatment rather than being assessed for each one separately.

According to the university, the findings suggest that health services may be missing chances to detect and address the coexistence of alcohol misuse and eating disorders at an earlier stage. That matters because patients can move through different parts of the health system over several years, with one condition recognized while the other goes unnoticed.

Lead author Dr. Jane Smith said the results support more integrated screening in clinical settings. Patients receiving treatment for eating disorders should also be routinely assessed for alcohol problems, she said, and the reverse should also happen. The data, she said, suggest that earlier identification could improve health outcomes.

The research found that people with a history of anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa were significantly more likely than the general population to receive a later diagnosis of an alcohol use disorder. The university did not provide detailed figures in the summary of the study, but said the pattern was clear across the datasets the team reviewed.

Researchers said the findings add to a broader body of evidence showing links between mental health conditions and substance misuse, an area that remains underrecognized in many health systems. In practice, that can mean a patient is treated for disordered eating in one setting and for alcohol misuse in another, without a shared assessment of how the conditions may interact.

The team recommended that policymakers and health services consider updating clinical guidelines to reflect the findings. A more holistic approach, they said, could help clinicians identify risk earlier, coordinate care more effectively and reduce the chance

that patients fall through gaps between mental health, addiction and general medical services.

Bournemouth University’s Centre for Public Health led the study in collaboration with national health agencies and data partners. The work focused on patterns found in health records, an approach researchers often use to track how diagnoses develop over time across large populations.

The study arrives as public health officials in several countries continue to look for better ways to address harmful drinking and other forms of substance misuse alongside psychiatric conditions. For the drinks industry, including beer, wine and spirits companies, the findings could add to pressure for stronger harm-reduction efforts and closer coordination with public health strategies aimed at identifying problematic drinking before it escalates.

The researchers did not argue that everyone with an eating disorder will later develop alcohol dependence, or that alcohol misuse is present in every case. Their point, as described by the university, is that the association is strong enough to justify routine checks in both directions so clinicians do not miss patients whose risks span more than one diagnosis.