

# Younger Patients Suffering From Liver Disease As Women Drink More During Pandemic

By Alice Gainer June 10, 2021 at 6:56 pm Filed Under: [Alcohol](#), [Alice Gainer](#), [Coronavirus](#), [COVID](#), [Drinking](#), [Health](#), [liver disease](#), [Local TV](#)



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**NEW YORK (CBSNewYork)** — Doctors say an alarming trend has been born out of the pandemic.

More and more women, particularly young women, drinking heavily during lockdown.

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A JAMA study found 41% of women drank more in 2020 than in 2019. In some cases, it cost them their lives.

CBS2's Alice Gainer spoke with Dr. Stavros Christoudias, a general surgeon working in the emergency room at several New Jersey hospitals. He compared photos of a healthy liver with those of a diseased liver.

"It's kind of the difference between looking at a flat surface of Jello and the difference between looking at the surface of oatmeal," Dr. Christoudias explained. "It looks like a grenade went off on this liver."

He said, prior to the past year, the youngest patient he had seen with end-stage liver



disease was about 45 to 50 years old.

"[Now], I've got 20-year-olds that we lost, didn't get a new liver in time," he said.

Recently, a 26-year-old female patient died.

"She turned jaundice. She got that very, very almost glow-in-the-dark yellow," said Dr. Christoudias. "She was no longer coherent, very confused."

"My current service has two 19-year-olds on it today and probably three people in their 20s and early 30s," added Dr. Nancy Reau, section chief of hepatology at Rush University Medical Center.

Dr. Reau said those patients are a mix of male and female, but added, "We already were seeing an increase in alcoholic hepatitis and alcohol-related liver disease in women pre-pandemic. It was just exacerbated by the pandemic."

Gainer also spoke with a 52-year-old working mother named Maureen, who has been in recovery since before the pandemic.

"There are moms bringing wine to games in water bottles," she said.

She said in addition to being surrounded by alcohol at business dinners and during trips, there has been an online push aimed at women over the years. For example, cups advertising wine as "mommy juice."

"It's definitely promoted in a way that makes people feel like this is a good coping mechanism," she added.

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"They're expected to always be on. They're never given a break," said Richard Ross, a licensed New Jersey social worker and psychotherapist.

Ross said some of his female patients took on even more during the pandemic, between children and schooling, work, relationships and the household.

"It started with depression and anxiety. And instead of treating it with other care, they try to sedate themselves with alcohol and drugs," he said.

He also pointed to accessibility. Liquor stores were deemed essential, and alcohol laws were relaxed.

"You can get vodka easier than you can get toilet paper," he said.

"People were having 'Zoom happy hours,'" said Dr. Indra Cidambi, medical director and founder of the Center for Network Therapy in New Jersey. "The party did not stop."

Especially when people didn't have to worry about things like driving.

Dr. Cidambi noted women's bodies are more sensitive to alcohol.

"The alcohol stays in your system for a longer period of time, so the damage is worse than a man," she said.

Isolation, grief and uncertainty pushed many to the brink.

"I don't think it's just going to be COVID vaccine better. I think there's going to be this second wave of addiction and mental health counseling we're going to have to fix to be able to get beyond that," Dr. Christoudias added.

Doctors say if you or someone you know may have a problem, the earlier you call for help, the better chance you have to turn things around.

The National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism defines heavy drinking for women as more than three drinks on any day or more than seven drinks a week.

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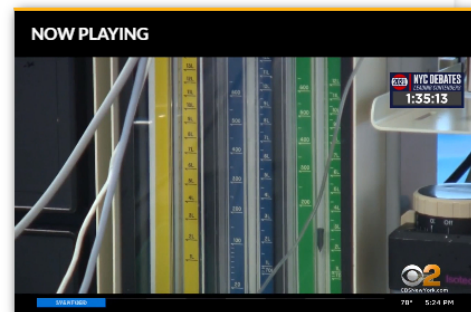
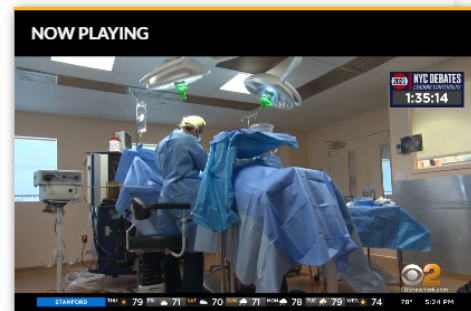
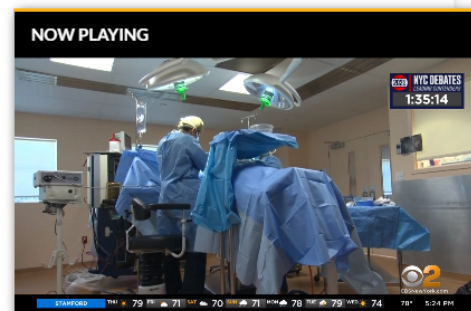
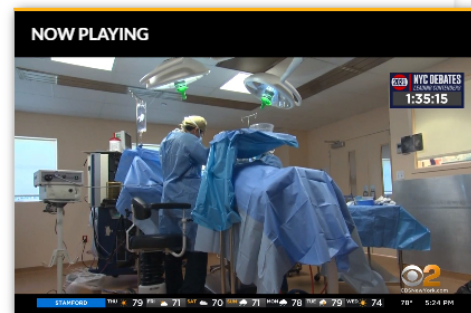
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Alice Gainer is a CBS 2 reporter and co-anchor for WLN-TV's (Channels 10/55) News at Nine weekdays.  
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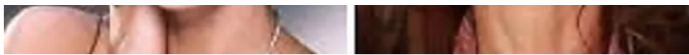
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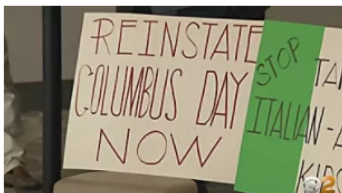
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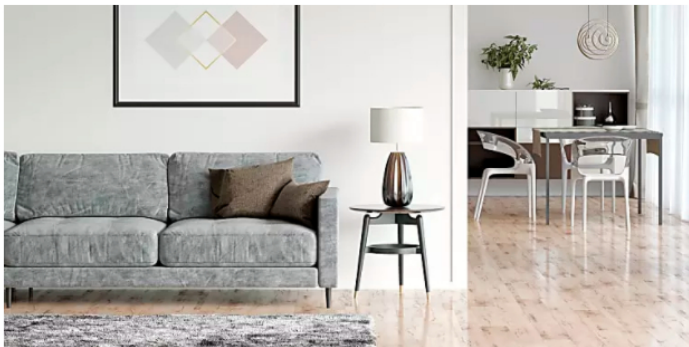
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