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New Study : High Doses of Christmas Cheer Linked to Heart Attack, Stroke

WASHINGTON, D.C.- It has become almost ubiquitous, permeating everything we see and do this time of year. However, new evidence has come to light that may put into question our relationship with this potent elixir. Late last week the National Institutes of Health released a study which linked high doses of Christmas Cheer to increased incidence of heart disease including myocardial infarction and stroke. While they await further tests to prove its safety and efficacy, experts at the Food and Drug Administration are currently considering what to do next, whether to require a black box warning label or ban the substance altogether.

Routinely prescribed for depression and Seasonal Affective Disorder, Christmas Cheer appears to have helped millions of people temporarily suppress mild psychological problems for periods of two weeks or upwards to a month. Following last week's safety warning, it is understandable that long-time patients have expressed feelings of betrayal at being left vulnerable to these dangerous side effects.

"I feel betrayed and unsafe," said 42-year-old mother of two Holly Reeths. "We let this seemingly innocuous substance into our homes only to find out now that it was slowly killing us all this time. I'm angry enough to sue the pants off of some big pharmaceutical company- if only I could find a manufacturer's name on the bottle."

Indeed, investigators at the FDA are currently looking into that issue. More specifically, the agency wants to know how long the unknown makers of Cheer knew of its inherent dangers and how long they knew it.

Industry analysts say the unnamed stock will drop precipitously this week with a slight bump after the panic subsides in a few weeks. Sensing a profit-taking opportunity, Merrill Lynch has begun pushing the stock on its customers though they have been unable to specify which ticker symbol to buy.

However, no one should be truly shocked by the study's conclusions since, as lead project scientist Dr. Baal Humberg points out, Christmas Cheer overdoses and Cheer-related heart ailments have become more and more common in recent years. In fact, you may not even be aware that someone you know is at risk until it is too late. Medical professionals are asking citizens to be on the lookout for danger signs in loved ones and co-workers during the critically important week before Christmas.

Humberg says that high risk individuals fit a profile: the lady with nine cats and a closet full of elaborately embroidered Christmas sweaters, the dad shuffling his kids from one holiday event to another lest they miss out on a single seasonal treat and hate him forever, or the mother who flies into a rage when her kids cause her decorations to look less perfect than her neighbors.

Though physicians say there is no evidence to indicate that Cheer is addictive, it has been shown that prolonged over-use can lead to a reverse effect in which the subject is left in far worse shape than if they had avoided Christmas Cheer completely.

These people end up with the trappings of Cheer but without the emotional lift that it brought them in the early days. Indeed, long-time users say that it takes higher and higher doses to have an effect as the years go by.

"When I was a kid, I only needed a little bit over Christmas and just a bit more to get me through New Years," said Reeths. "But since Tim left and the dog committed suicide, some nights I find myself drenched in sweat and suddenly realizing that I've been doing Cheer all day, like waking up inside a dream."

Bearing these dangers in mind, it seems that continued use is ill advised. Some are even questioning why physicians began prescribing Christmas Cheer in the first place.

"With the research we've done so far, I've concluded that Cheer is no more effective for the purposes prescribed than ordinary everyday PCP," said Humberg. "In fact, the symptomatic profile and side effects lead me to believe that they may be one in the same. We're still looking into that one."

The worst part, say researchers, is that the warning over Christmas Cheer is only the beginning. Its chemical composition and mode of action put it in a category with a whole slew of other substances, each of which must now be examined for safety issues.

Hopefully the NIH and FDA will have more answers before Valentines Bitterroot comes into wide use at the end of January.

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