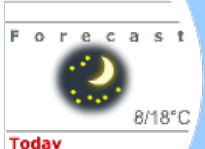


**Halifax**

Forecast



Today 8/18°C

weatheroffice  
Environment Canada  
Government of Canada

Text + -

# In praise of early alcohol abstinence

By JASON BROWN  
Sat, Sep 17 - 4:55 AM



JASON BROWN

What's stuck in my mind in recent days are a couple of stories with a similar theme.

A 19-year-old Acadia University student died earlier this month after a night of drinking. And Jack Tobin, the son of former Newfoundland and Labrador premier Brian Tobin, was sentenced to three years in jail for driving while drunk and running over his friend.

What senseless, avoidable tragedies.

But how do we, as members of society, best prevent the grave problems associated with young people and alcohol?

I often read and enjoy Leslie Lowe's column in The Chronicle Herald, and in last Saturday's column, she wrote about parents educating their children about alcohol. But part of the argument inherent in the article I have to take issue with, on a mathematical level. And that is her analogy between adolescent drinking and sex. After drawing the analogy that keeping teenagers from drinking alcohol is like keeping them from having sex, she implies that since abstinence from sex doesn't work for adolescents, neither does abstinence from drinking alcohol.

The issue, for me, as a mathematician, is the line of reasoning. Just because you can draw an analogy doesn't make it valid. Are the two items, events or situations really that similar? Couldn't we just as well draw an analogy to smoking and promote early introduction to smoking for teens to promote responsible smoking?

On the surface, abstinence from drinking and sex could sound similar — many teens want to do both, peer pressure can be a factor, and so on. But there are many ways that they are different as well. So while an analogy could be drawn, as a scientist, I need some proof. Does keeping teens from trying alcohol prevent them from developing associated problems later on, or not?

This is something that should have evidence, one way or the other.

I did a search on the Internet and came up immediately with a 1997 research article titled Exploring the Effects of Age of Alcohol Use Initiation and Psychological Risk Factors on Subsequent Alcohol Misuse from the Journal of Studies on Alcohol.

The paper was exactly what I was looking for — a scientific, thorough study, with the mathematics and statistics to back it up. I encourage you to look it up and read it. The scientific study followed a large sample of Grade 5 students in the United States over eight years, and tracked their alcohol usage (if any) and any associated problems. They had a few questions in mind to answer, including the one of whether the age of initiation at which a child/teen starts drinking alcohol was a factor in the misuse of alcohol later on in adolescence.

Their conclusions, based on statistical evaluation of the results, showed that "the younger

[LOGIN/REGISTER](#)

Search this site:

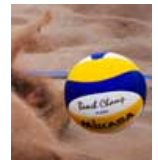
### PHOTO GALLERIES



Week in Pictures  
Sept. 4-10



911  
a look back



FIVB Beach  
Volleyball

ANNOUNCEMENTS: [Obituaries](#) | [Births](#) | [Cards](#) | [InMemoriams](#) | [Milestones](#)



Imagine just 3 minutes to gather your family and flee.

**REFUGEE CAMP IN THE HEART OF THE CITY**

Experience our free interactive exhibit  
The Garrison Grounds, Halifax Sept 15 – 18

www.refugeecamp.ca

### WEEKLY SCIENCE

[Helping smokers butt out \(2011-09-17\)](#)

[In praise of early alcohol abstinence \(2011-09-17\)](#)

[Aging musicians' ears filter background noise \(2011-09-17\)](#)

[SCIENCE QUESTIONS \(2011-09-17\)](#)

RECOMMENDED   EMAILED   COMMENTED   **VIEWED**

1. [Seeking closure, five years later](#) (10,115 views)
2. [Cross-burning victim faces assault charges](#) (8,638 views)
3. [Black widow taken from grapes to science lab](#) (5,067 views)
4. [Moose live up to early hype](#) (3,987 views)
5. [DNA tests next for man who says he's Diefenbaker's son](#) (3,830 views)
6. [Top soldier must repay trip costs](#) (3,682 views)
7. [Drug dog's find deemed reliable](#) (3,611 views)
8. [The tale of the cat on the roof](#) (3,108 views)
9. [Swissair investigator dismisses claim of incendiary device](#) (3,019 views)
10. [Pulp mill screeches to a stop](#) (2,949 views)

individuals are when they begin drinking alcohol, the greater their level of problems associated with alcohol misuse." And the authors conclude that the "importance of age initiation should be a goal of programs seeking to prevent alcohol misuse."

That seems pretty clear to me, and points to the absolute necessity of having statistical studies. We can't go on beliefs, intuition and analogies. They often lead us in the wrong direction, and we need science and mathematics to guide us. That line of reasoning is something we can all raise a non-alcoholic drink to.

Jason I. Brown is a professor of mathematics at Dalhousie University in Halifax. His research that used mathematics to uncover how the Beatles played the opening chord of A Hard Day's Night has garnered worldwide attention. He is also the author Our Days Are Numbered: How Mathematics Orders Our Lives. ([jbrown@herald.ca](mailto:jbrown@herald.ca))



**The ChronicleHerald.ca**

**NEWS**

- Front Page
- Metro
- Nova Scotia
- Canada
- World
- Business
- Sports
- Arts & Life
- Travel
- Books
- Religion
- Science
- The Nova Scotian

**COMMUNITY**

- Community News
- NS Communities

**OPINIONS**

- Editorials
- Columnists
- News Columns
- Business Columns
- Sports Columns
- Arts & Life Columns
- Community Blogs
- Community Reviews
- Editorial Cartoon

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Obituaries
- Births
- Cards
- In Memoriams
- Milestones
- Contact us to place an Announcement

**MULTIMEDIA**

- Photos
- Videos
- Community Photos

**JOBSPRESS**

- JobsPress
- Advertising
- Post a Job

**WHEELS**

- Wheels
- Search
- Sell Your Vehicle
- Dealers

**NEWSPAPER**

- Today's E-Paper
- Classifieds
- Place a Classified Ad
- Subscribe
- NIE
- Professional Directory
- South Shore Calendar

**ABOUT THE HERALD**

- About Us
- Contact Us
- Work @ The Herald
- F.A.Q
- Library Services
- Privacy Policy
- Terms of Use

**ADVERTISING**

- Advertising Sales
- Web Advertising
- Media Kits, Etc.
- Place a Classified Ad
- Pay Your Account

**CLIENTS**

- Print Upload
- Web Upload
- Real Estate Portal
- Media Kits, Etc.

**FUN & GAMES**

- Lotteries
- Sudoku
- Crossword
- Comics
- Contests

**USEFUL INFORMATION**

- E-Flyers
- Eye on Nova Scotia
- N.S. Highway Cams
- Horoscope
- Lotteries
- Tides
- Weather
- Movie Times
- What's Happening
- Mayflower TV Guide
- Herald Archive