Montreal — Women who drank alcohol, especially those consuming at least five beers per week, were at increased risk of developing psoriasis, based on an analysis of the Nurses’ Health Study.

Comprised of 116,667 women who drank alcohol (defined as consumption of at least 30 grams, or roughly two drinks, per week) had a significantly increased risk of developing psoriasis, with a relative risk (RR) of 1.6, said Dr. Patrick Dominguez, who presented his findings at the annual meeting of the Society for Investigative Dermatology.

When type of alcohol was examined, however, only regular beer was significantly associated with an increased risk of psoriasis. In a significant predictor (RR 1.8) for the development of psoriasis, “For any amount of light beer, wine, or liquor consumed, the relative risks were not significant.”

At study entry in 1989, women in the Nurses’ Health Study were asked about their level of alcohol consumption in grams per week. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a standard drink contains 13.7 grams of alcohol and is defined as: 5 ounces of wine, 8 ounces of malt liquor, 4 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.

Over a 14-year period, biennial questionnaires were used to monitor both the amount as well as the type of alcohol consumed (regular beer, light beer, wine, or liquor), said Dr. Dominguez, who is a research fellow in the department of dermatology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston.

In 2005, participants were asked if they had psoriasis. A total of 2,169 reported a diagnosis of psoriasis, 1,126 were prevalent cases and the remaining 1,007 were incident cases, said Dr. Dominguez, who did not disclose any conflicts of interest. After excluding incident cases for which there was incomplete information on alcohol consumption, 953 participants with new onsets psoriasis were included for analysis.

The abstainers and women who drank alcohol did not differ significantly in age.

Beer Consumption to Boost Psoriasis Risk

BY KATE JOHNSON

Beer was recently found to boost psoriasis risk, according to a paper by Dr. Patrick Dominguez, a research fellow in the department of dermatology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. This was the first time that the risk of psoriasis was shown to be increased by alcohol consumption.

“Beer is a major contributor to psoriasis risk,” Dr. Dominguez said, “and we think this is due to the fact that alcohol can exacerbate inflammation.”

Dr. Dominguez noted that the study was a large-scale prospective cohort study of 116,667 women who drank alcohol. The study found that women who drank at least five beers per week had a significantly increased risk of developing psoriasis, with a relative risk (RR) of 1.6. This risk was highest for regular beer, with a RR of 1.8. The study also found that light beer, wine, and liquor did not significantly increase the risk of psoriasis.

The study was conducted over a 14-year period, with biennial questionnaires monitoring both the amount and type of alcohol consumed. The study included 2,169 participants who were asked if they had psoriasis. Of these, 1,126 were prevalent cases and 1,007 were incident cases. After excluding incident cases for which there was incomplete information on alcohol consumption, 953 participants with new cases of psoriasis were included for analysis.

Dr. Dominguez noted that the study was not randomized and that there were limitations, such as the possibility of misclassification of alcohol intake and the fact that the study was conducted in a single location. However, he said, “Our results are consistent with previous studies and suggest that alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk of psoriasis.”

Gluten, which is found in beer but not other forms of alcohol, may be a trigger.

Abstainers had higher body mass indices. Drinkers were more physically active, and a higher percentage of drinkers also reported current or past smoking.

One possible explanation for the study’s findings is that gluten, a non-alcoholic ingredient found in beer, might trigger the onset of psoriasis, Dr. Dominguez speculated.

“There are multiple case series in which patients with gluten sensitivity, or celiac disease, and psoriasis go on a gluten-free diet, and their psoriasis clears up,” he said in an interview. “Beer is the only alcoholic drink that contains gluten. Light beer has some gluten but much less.”