A program that uses parents and peers to help prevent college freshmen from becoming or staying heavy drinkers has shown promise in a new study by researchers at Penn State.

"Research shows there is a spike in alcohol-related consequences that occur in the first few weeks of the semester, especially with college freshmen," researcher Michael J. Cleveland said in a news release. "If you can buffer that and get beyond that point and safely navigate through that passage, you reduce the risk of later problems occurring."

The researchers studied two sets of interventions, one using parents and one using peers. They found that students who did not drink before starting college, and who received the parent-based intervention, were unlikely to become heavy drinkers in the first semester.

Students who drank heavily the summer before starting college were more likely to cut down on drinking if they received intervention either from parents or peers. If they received both interventions, there was no effect, Science Daily reports.

The study included 1,275 college students thought to be at high risk of heavy drinking because they were former high school athletes. They were assigned to one of four groups: intervention from parents, intervention from peers, intervention from both, or no intervention. They were surveyed the summer before they started college and again during their first semester.

The parents in the intervention group received a handbook describing how to discuss drinking with their child, and how to relate to their college student. Peers participating in the study met individually with a trained peer facilitator once within the first two weeks of college. They discussed topics including drinking consequences, caloric consumption of alcohol and how much exercise was needed to burn those calories off.

The results are published online in Psychology of Addictive Behaviors.