**Three hours of exercise a week can offset some of the dangers of alcohol, study suggests**

* [Will Worley](http://www.independent.co.uk/author/will-worley)
* [@willrworley](https://twitter.com/willrworley)
* Thursday 8 September 2016
* [5 comments](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/exercise-alcohol-offset-dangers-cancer-health-study-a7232351.html#commentsDiv)

But scientists stress drinking alcohol remains a potentially harmful activity

Regular exercise could mitigate some of the harmful effects of drinking [alcohol](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/Alcohol), new research has suggested.

However, scientists also stressed that consuming alcohol remains a potentially risky activity and suggested the study indicated the great health benefits of exercise.

The research, for which scientists from University College London and the University of Sydney analysed the behaviour of over-forties, is described as the first of its kind.

The habits of the subjects were compared with national health surveys from England and Scotland dating back to 1994.

Results showed those who performed regular physical activity and drank between recommended and harmful levels had a reduced risk of death from all causes associated with alcohol.

In some cases, the exercise even appeared to cancel out the risk completely. Those who only drank occasionally were also at lower risk.

With the minimum recommended amount of exercise just 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week, the exercises could be activities as light as gardening, brisk walking and golf.

However, the study did not take into account drinking habits or other dietary factors which can also influence health.

The study said: "Our results provide an additional argument for the role of (physical activity) as a means to promote the health of the population even in the presence of other less healthy behaviours.

"The public health relevance of our results is further emphasised by the [recently updated alcohol consumption guidelines](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/new-alcohol-guidelines-how-is-drinking-linked-to-cancer-a6802596.html) review by the UK chief medical officer that found that cancer mortality risk starts from a relatively low level of alcohol consumption."

The study, [published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*](http://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2016/07/04/bjsports-2016-096194), said a quarter of respondents met the higher weekly target for exercise, while just over 60 per cent did not meet the minimum recommended amount.

Just under 15 per cent did not drink at all, while 13 per cent drank more than the daily recommended maximum - when it was classified as more than 35 units per week for women and 49 units for men.

Head of health information at the World Cancer Research Fund, Sarah Toule, said: "We would not recommend that anyone sees these findings as a ‘get out of jail free card’, as alcohol does increase the risk of many different health conditions, including cancer.

"Doing more physical activity can have great health benefits and our own evidence shows that, if everyone in the UK was regularly active, about 12,000 cancer cases could be prevented every year. However, by not drinking alcohol, 24,000 cancer cases could be avoided."

*Press Association contributed to this report.*