**DRINKING PINT OF BEER A DAY LINKED TO REDUCED RISK OF HEART ATTACK**

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Moderate drinkers less likely than teetotallers and heavy drinkers to see doctor for heart conditions including angina and strokes caused by blood clots

Drinking one pint a day has been linked to reduced risk of developing several serious [heart conditions](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/HeartDisease) in new large-scale study.

Moderate [drinking](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/drinking), usually defined as no more than 14 units of alcohol a week – equivalent to around one and a half bottles of wine or seven pints of regular-strength lager – is associated with a lower risk of developing some, but not all, cardiovascular diseases, said scientists.

Researchers at the University of Cambridge and University College London analysed electronic health records for nearly two million healthy UK adults.

They found moderate drinkers were less likely than teetotallers and heavy drinkers to see a doctor for seven conditions including heart attacks and strokes caused by blood clots.

Steven Bell, who led the research, told *The Independent*there could be a number of possible explanations for the findings.

“In terms of biology, people who drink in moderation tend to have lower levels of inflammation, or higher levels of good cholesterol,” he said.

“But some people would say these people just tend to be more healthy and socially engaged, and that’s leading to lower levels of different types of heart disease than the drinking itself.”

The research, [published](http://www.bmj.com/content/356/bmj.j909) in the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ), adds to already existing evidence that drinking alcohol within recommended limits may reduce the risk of developing heart disease.

Dr Bell said the study of 1.93 million adults was “larger than all previous studies when pooled together”.

“We linked databases containing patients’ alcohol consumption recorded by GP or practice nurses to disease and test registries,” he said.

“One of the advantages of doing this is we were able to create a dataset representative of the general population, at a much larger scale than previous studies.”

The scientists used the data to examine the link between alcohol consumption and 12 heart conditions.

When compared to moderate drinking, not drinking at all was linked to increased risk of unstable angina, heart attack, sudden coronary death, heart failure, [stroke caused by loss of blood flow](http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/world-stroke-day-new-treatment-can-directly-remove-a-brain-clot-a6713131.html), abdominal aneurysm and peripheral arterial disease.

However it didn’t appear to have an effect on chronic stable angina, cardiac arrest, brain attack (‘mini-stroke’) caused by blood clots or two different types of brain haemorrhage.

Dr Bell said the research shouldn't be seen by non-drinkers as a reason to take up drinking alcohol, because there are safer, more effective ways to lower risk of heart disease, such as a healthy diet.

Past research has shown an association between moderate drinking and reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, but these have been controversial due to the grouping of non-drinkers with former drinkers, who may have stopped due to ill health.

To address this, the study separated non-drinkers from former and occasional drinkers. It also focussed on each patient's first visit to a doctor where they were diagnosed with cardiovascular disease.

Drinking more than the recommended limits was linked with an increased risk of most of the conditions, but was found to carry a lower risk of heart attack and angina.

​James Nicholls, director of research and policy development at [Alcohol Research UK](http://www.independent.co.uk/topic/alcohol-research-uk), said the findings “should be taken seriously” and called the study “an important contribution to the evidence on a controversial subject”.

“A particular strength of this study is that, because of the numbers involved, the researchers are able to separate out different risks for different heart conditions,” he said.

“The idea that ‘alcohol is good for the heart’ overlooks the fact that there are a wide range of heart conditions and that, knowing what we do about the biological effects of alcohol, the effect of drinking on these conditions should vary.

“This study confirms that alcohol produces different patterns of risk depending whether we are looking at, say, myocardial infarction or angina.”

Researchers at Harvard Medical School and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in the US said the study “sets the stage for ever larger and more sophisticated studies that will attempt to harness the flood of big data into a stream of useful, reliable, and unbiased findings”.