**An alcoholic tipple a day could PREVENT you having a heart attack - but there's a catch**

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Moderate drinking can slash the risk of a [**heart attack**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/heart-attack), angina or heart failure, experts have found.

They studied two million Brits and discovered confirmed that having no more than 14 units of [**alcohol**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/alcohol)per week offers a protective effect for the heart compared with not drinking.

Previous studies have suggested that alcohol has a positive effect on the levels of “good” cholesterol in the blood as well as proteins associated with blood clotting.

The new study, published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ), found that moderate drinkers were less likely to turn up at their doctor suffering from angina, heart attack, [**heart failure**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/heart-disease), ischaemic stroke (the most common type), circulation problems caused by a build-up of fat in the arteries and aortic aneurysm than non-drinkers.

But the research found that heavy drinking (more than 14 units) increased the risk of heart failure, a cardiac arrest, ischaemic stroke and circulation problems caused by fatty arteries.

However, the University of Cambridge and [**University College London**](http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/university-college-london) cautioned: “While we found that moderate drinkers were less likely to initially present with several cardiovascular diseases than non-drinkers, it could be argued that it would be unwise to encourage individuals to take up drinking as a means of lowering their risk.

“This is because there are arguably safer and more effective ways of reducing cardiovascular risk, such as increasing physical activity and smoking cessation, which do not incur increased risks of alcohol-related harm such as alcohol dependence, liver disease and cancer.”

In a linked editorial, researchers at Harvard Medical School and Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in the US said the findings highlighted “lower rates of essentially every meaningful cardiovascular outcome except haemorrhagic stroke among moderate drinkers than among abstainers.

“Four decades of epidemiological studies have largely found the same.”

Dave Roberts, director general of the Alcohol Information Partnership, which is funded by drinks firms including Diageo, Pernod Ricard, Campari and Bacardi, said: “This new study confirms yet again what previous studies have consistently found.

“Moderate alcohol consumption can have a beneficial impact on health. This study demonstrates that the anti-alcohol campaigners’ mantra that there is no safe limit just doesn’t stack up.”

Dr James Nicholls, Director of Research and Policy Development at Alcohol Research UK, said: “This large-scale study provides strong evidence that the so-called ‘J-curve’ exists: meaning that, in most cases, moderate drinkers are less likely to suffer a heart condition than either heavy drinkers or people who don’t drink at all.

“It is an important contribution to the evidence on a controversial subject and its findings should be taken seriously.”

Tracy Parker, heart health dietician at the British Heart Foundation, said: “This study suggests that sticking within alcohol guidelines may actually lower your risk of some heart conditions.

“But it’s important to remember that the risks of drinking alcohol far outweigh any possible benefits.

“And these findings are certainly no reason to start drinking alcohol if you don’t already.

“There are far more effective ways of improving your heart health such as regular exercise, a good diet and quitting smoking.

“If you’re over 40 you should also consider a free NHS health check, to better understand your risk of heart disease and the steps you can take to lower it.”

And Sarah Toule, Head of Health Information at World Cancer Research Fund, warned: “This study highlights just how important it is for people to keep within the Government’s recommended drinking limit.

“However, for cancer prevention, we do recommend avoiding alcohol as much as possible, as the risks associated with alcohol far outweigh any benefit that might be seen for other conditions.

“Drinking alcohol increases the risk of a number of different cancers, including breast cancer. If no one drank, around 24,000 cancer cases could be prevented in the UK every year.”