



Alcohol + Exercise Improves Heart Health

If you are a heart patient and wish to live a long life, then you should switch to a healthy active lifestyle and combine it with a little alcohol consumption; these are the findings of a study published in the *European Heart Journal*.

A team of researchers led by Professor Morton Gronbaek, from Copenhagen's National Institute of Public Health in Denmark undertook the study covering nearly 12,000 men and women. They followed the participants for a period of nearly 20 years, during which period 1,242 people died from ischaemic heart disease (IHD).

They looked at the levels of exercise these people took as well as their consumption of alcohol. The researchers found that people living an active lifestyle had less chances of heart disease; however, their risk was even lower if they drank moderately.

The highest risk of heart disease was found to be among people who neither drank nor exercised, 49% higher than people who either drank or exercised or did both. When the researchers drew comparisons between people at similar levels of exercise, moderate alcohol drinkers – those who drank one to 14 units* a week were found to have 30% lesser risk of developing heart disease compared to non-drinkers.

No difference in risk rates was found between completely inactive people and people who regularly exercised vigorously among the alcohol drinkers; their overall risk declined as their exercise levels increased.

Similarly, people who were physically active but did not drink were 31%-33% less likely to suffer from IHD compared to people who were non-drinkers and physically inactive. On the other hand, physically active people who also drank at least one drink a week faced up to 50% lesser risk of IHD than that faced by physically inactive people who did not drink.

The researchers arrived at similar conclusions when they looked at deaths from all causes. They

found that physical activity reduced risk, with moderate drinking levels bringing the risk even lower. The findings are in tune with earlier studies that have shown that alcohol consumption might bring down the risk of heart disease by boosting the levels of good cholesterol and thinning the blood.

Professor Gronbaek said, Our study shows that being both physically active and drinking a moderate amount of alcohol is important for lowering the risk of both fatal IHD and death from all causes.

Ellen Mason, a cardiac nurse at the British Heart Foundation said, The combination of moderate drinking and physical activity appears to be a winning one in reducing the risk of fatal heart disease. However, drinking too much starts to outweigh the benefits of alcohol intake and can increase your blood pressure.

Physical activity has shown greater benefits to heart health and overall health in previous research compared to drinking alcohol. Alcohol is a depressant whereas exercise releases mood-enhancing hormones which can benefit quality of life as well as reduce the risk of death, she added.

* A unit of alcohol is defined as half a pint of normal strength beer, or a single shot of a spirit. A medium-sized glass of wine is two units.