

# A Few Drinks May Help the Heart, But Not If You Also Light Up

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You can toss one back on occasion, but don't light up too if you're interested in avoiding heart and stroke problems, according to findings of a British study presented at an American Academy of Neurology press conference in Toronto and reported by [HealthDay News](#).

For the study, researchers followed the drinking and smoking habits of more than 22,500 British men and women, ages 39 to 79, for an average of 12 years. (None of the study participants had previous episodes of heart attack, cancer or stroke before joining the study.) By the study's end, 864 participants had experienced strokes.

What researchers observed was that heavy-drinking participants received no stroke protection compared with non-drinkers. In addition, they linked overindulging in alcohol to an increased risk of stroke.

But when participants engaged in light-to-moderate imbibing, their odds of stroke decreased compared with that of non-drinkers. (And other studies have supported this conclusion.)

If conservative-drinking participants smoked, however, they essentially puffed away this benefit, said researchers.

"Any potential beneficial effect of drinking moderate amounts of alcohol on stroke may be counteracted by cigarette smoking," said Yangmei Li, a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Public Health at the University of Cambridge, and the study's lead researcher.

In particular, researchers observed the least risk of stroke among nonsmokers who drank between three to 14 glasses of wine each week.

But the critical messages people should get from this study are that they should not smoke (or stop if they do) and that if they drink excessively they should reduce their alcohol intake, said Ralph L. Sacco, MD, chairman of the department of neurology at the University of Miami.

For more about how smoking affects your health, read [this](#).

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