

'Beneficial' effects of alcohol?

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According a new study of over 3,000 adults aged 70-79, the apparent association between light-to-moderate alcohol consumption and reduced risk of functional decline over time did not hold up after adjustments were made for characteristics related to lifestyle, in particular physical activity, body weight, education, and income.

The authors of the study, publishing today in the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#), say this suggests that life-style related characteristics may be the real determinant of the reported beneficial effects of alcohol and functional decline.

"In recent years the relationship between alcohol intake and health outcomes has gained growing attention, but while there is now

considerable consensus that consuming alcohol at moderate levels has a specific [beneficial effect](#) on the risk of [cardiovascular disease](#), the benefit of alcohol intake on other health-related outcomes is less convincing," said study author Cinzia Maraldi, M.D., of the University of Ferrara, Italy. "We wanted to evaluate this question over a long-term follow-up and with a prospective design, which most previous studies have not used."

During a follow-up time of six and a half years, the researchers found that participants consuming moderate levels of alcohol had the lowest incidence of mobility limitation and disability. After adjusting for [demographic characteristics](#), moderate alcohol intake was still associated with reduced risk compared to never or occasional consumption, but adjusting for life-style related variables substantially reduced the strength of the associations. Adjustment for diseases and health status indicators did not affect the strength of the associations, which led the authors to conclude that life-style is the most important factor in confounding this relationship.

"Globally taken, these results suggest that the reported protective effect of moderate alcohol intake on physical performance may be only apparent, because life-style related characteristics seem to be the real determinant of the reported association, suggesting caution in attributing a direct benefit of moderate [alcohol intake](#) on functional ability," added Maraldi. "This assumes particular relevance given the risk of alcohol-dependence and the health hazards associated with excessive alcohol consumption. From this point of view, in our opinion life-style recommendations for the prevention of disability should be based on interventions proven to be safe and effective, such as weight control and physical exercise."

More information: The abstract can be viewed at [www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo ... /1/122592468/abstract](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/jo.../1/122592468/abstract)

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