

Smokers quitting tobacco also drink less alcohol

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People who have recently begun an attempt to quit smoking tobacco are more likely to try to drink less alcohol than other smokers, according to research published in the open access journal *BMC Public Health*.

In England, people who attempted to [stop smoking](#) within the last week reported lower levels of [alcohol consumption](#), were less likely to binge drink, and were more likely to be classified as 'light drinkers' (having a low alcohol risk) compared with those who did not attempt to stop smoking.

Lead author Jamie Brown, from University College London, England, said: "These results go against the commonly held view that people who stop smoking tend to drink more to compensate. It's possible that they are heeding advice to try to avoid alcohol because of its link to relapse."

Previous research has shown that tobacco dependence and alcohol consumption are closely related. The study involved household surveys, where a total of 6,287 out of 31,878 people reported smoking between March 2014 and September 2015. Of these, 144 had begun an attempt to [quit smoking](#) in the week before the survey. The respondents completed the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test consumption questionnaire (Audit-C). The data were a cross sectional representation of the population of adults in England.

The researchers looked at the association among smokers in England between a recent attempt to quit smoking and alcohol consumption.

They identified smokers as light or heavy drinkers (light was indicated with an Audit-C score below 5 and heavy was indicated with an Audit-C score greater than 5) and analysed their recent attempt to stop smoking (identified by those who had attempted to quit in the last week with those who had not) and a current attempt to cut down on their drinking.

This was an observational study which means that it cannot demonstrate cause and effect. It may be that smokers choose to restrict their alcohol consumption when attempting to quit smoking to reduce the chance of relapse. Alternatively, it could be that people who drink less are more likely to quit smoking. If this is the case, smokers with higher alcohol consumption may need further encouragement to quit smoking.

Jamie Brown adds: "We can't yet determine the direction of causality. Further research is needed to disentangle whether attempts to quit smoking precede attempts to restrict alcohol consumption or vice versa. We'd also need to rule out other factors which make both more likely. Such as the diagnosis of a health problem causing attempts to cut down on both drinking and smoking."

This study is part of an ongoing Smoking Toolkit Study and Alcohol Toolkit Study, designed to provide tracking information about [smoking](#), alcohol consumption and related behaviors in England. Each month a new sample of approximately 1700 adults aged 16 and over complete a face-to-face computer assisted survey. The Smoking Toolkit Study and the Alcohol Toolkit Study are primarily funded by Cancer Research UK and the NIHR School for Public Health Research respectively.

More information: Jamie Brown et al. Are recent attempts to quit smoking associated with reduced drinking in England? A cross-sectional population survey, *BMC Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-016-3223-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-016-3223-6)

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