

Headline	Cutting down on alcohol may strengthen immune system		
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Cutting down on alcohol may strengthen immune system

A NEW study reveals that heavy drinking can worsen the effects of illness and weaken your immune system against viruses.

To see how alcohol affects resistance to infection, Gyongyi Szabo of the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester and colleagues exposed infection-fighting white blood cells to chemicals that mimic viruses and bacteria. "Half of the cells were also soused in the levels of alcohol that a person might have in their blood after quaffing four or five alcoholic drinks daily for a week," wrote British scientific magazine *New Scientist* on the study.

The findings revealed that alcohol weakened the white blood cells defences, with researchers noting that heavy drinking can lower your immunity to a range of serious viruses, including Hepatitis C and HIV.

Szabo, who next hopes to see how alcohol affects flu vaccines, warns that heavy drinkers should beware of the damage they may be causing to their immune systems.

The research was published on September 29 in *BioMed Central's* open access journal *BMC Immunology*.

Researchers at the University of Santiago of Compostela in Spain revealed earlier this year that students who drank heavily - more than five alcoholic drinks for men and four for women on one occasion - scored lower on a verbal learning test than students who didn't binge drink.

Heavy drinking, long known as a cause of liver damage, is also linked to heart disease, according to a ten-year study in Northern Ireland and France published last year by the *British Medical Journal*.

What is a safe level of drinking? The NIAAA cites that for most adults, drinking up to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women causes few if any problems. One drink equals one 12-ounce (355 ml) bottle of beer, one 5-ounce (150 ml) glass of wine, or 1.5 ounces (40-50 ml) of 80-proof distilled spirits. - Relaxnews