



## Alcohol Consumption and Exercise

80% of people aged 15 years or over were drinking alcohol on a regular basis according to statistics in NZ.

While the short-term impact on fitness levels from a few drinks may only be reduced energy levels at your next workout, for the 20% of New Zealanders that report a potentially hazardous alcohol consumption pattern, there is likely to be a negative effect on fitness gains, and overall health in the medium to long term.

The worst-case scenario is that in the long term as a result of regular and excessive drinking, varying degrees of muscle damage and weakness, and an increase in lifestyle diseases, and the risk of early death.

There has been research to indicate a moderate intake of alcohol can have some health benefits, specifically related to a potential lowering of the risk of developing heart disease, stroke, or type 2 diabetes. But before you refill your glass, it's worth noting that these possible health benefits are gained with low consumption levels, and with the overall impact small, or even nonexistent in some cases.

If it's health benefits you are after, it may be worth looking at other interventions that have a higher success rate, including physical activity and exercise.

The acute effects of alcohol on exercise performance mean that not too many people try and combine the two. You will find that you are less coordinated, your power decreases, and your eye hand co-ordination is compromised. Not great for those trying to reach fitness and health goals.

For most drinkers, the impact is felt the following day; a late night out may mean that an early workout is cancelled. Too much alcohol can slow down the absorption of water and increase urine output which would both lead to dehydration, and reduction in co-ordination and overall performance. But, while a hangover will reduce your output and exercise performance, the impact wears off as your hangover does.

The current health recommendations are to limit consumption to 2 standard drinks a day for women, and 3 standard drinks for men with at least 2 alcohol free nights a week.

If maintaining a healthy weight is one of your goals, then alcohol consumption will have to be counted as part of your energy intake. And while it has a low nutritional value, a gram of alcohol contains 7 calories, second only to fat (at 9 calories). Most drinkers also report additional calories consumed along with alcohol.

Overall, a low to moderate intake of alcohol may be ok, but making sure it doesn't get in the way of getting active is important.

References:

<https://www.peakendurancesport.com/nutrition-for-endurance-athletes/recovery-nutrition/post-exercise-tipple-yes-or-no/>

<http://www.hpa.org.nz/research-library/research-publications/last-drinking-occasion-number-of-drinks-and-time-spent-drinking-in-fact>

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