

# Exercise significantly reduces alcohol cravings, says new study

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Exercise has been found to significantly reduce alcohol cravings in university students, according to a new study.

Researchers recruited 60 male and [female participants](#), aged 18 to 25 years old, from the British Midlands.

The group took part in a short discussion where members were asked to think about and describe their favorite drinks and drinking habits. They were also shown a video about cocktail making.

They were then split into three groups:

## **Exercise**

The active intervention condition included participation in a five-minute [exercise](#) routine consisting of squats, mountain climbers, push-ups, jumping jacks, heel kicks, and sit-ups. Each exercise was performed for 45 seconds in a typical continuous circuit formation.

## **Distraction**

The distraction (active control) condition involved sitting and coloring in a picture book for five minutes.

## **Control**

The passive control condition involved sitting silently doing nothing in the laboratory for five minutes, with only the research assistant present.

Following the groups, all the students completed a series of questionnaires about drinking, cravings and their mood.

The analysis showed that those in the exercise group had significantly reduced alcohol craving when compared with those in the control group.

Researchers also found that positive mood increased, and anxiety and

negative mood decreased for the exercisers.

The coloring group did not significantly reduce craving. However, they did report increased mood and reduced anxiety.

The participants also completed an online program that provided information and education on [alcohol abuse](#).

However, the team found that this only worsened negative mood and anxiety and did not change alcohol craving.

Ph.D. student Aleksandra Gawor, of Loughborough's School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, who led the study, said, "Alcohol abuse is associated with chronic disabling disease, such as cancer, [heart disease](#), dementia and diabetes, and has high human and economic costs.

"It often starts in [young adults](#), especially students—and we found that misuse in this group has increased over the years.

"One of the vital contributors to the onset and maintenance of alcohol abuse is craving.

"But our experiments found that a short exercise circuit helps reduce alcohol craving and improves mood in students.

"This [knowledge base](#) will aid in our ability to potentially utilize exercise as a therapeutic tool to assist reduction of alcohol craving, as well as develop greater understanding in the mechanisms that may underlie hazardous alcohol use and addictive behavior."

The full paper is available in the journal *Addictive Behaviors*.

**More information:** Aleksandra Gawor et al, Does an acute bout of

moderate exercise reduce alcohol craving in university students?,  
*Addictive Behaviors* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107071](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.107071)

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