# Adverse health effects of smoking, alcohol and inactivity seen by age 36, Finnish study finds



A long-term Finnish study has revealed that the adverse effects of smoking, excessive alcohol consumption and insufficient physical activity become apparent by the age of 36, with consequences for both mental and physical health. The research underlines the importance of modifying these behaviours early in adulthood and midlife to prevent subsequent health complications.

The study, published in the Annals of Medicine, involved tracking 326 individuals initially at age 27, with follow-up assessments conducted at ages 36, 42, 50 and 61. By the final stage, 206 participants remained in the study. Researchers assessed mental health through surveys on depressive symptoms and psychological wellbeing, while physical health was evaluated using a metabolic risk score. This score was derived from measurements such as blood pressure, waist circumference and levels of blood sugar, cholesterol and blood fats.

Participants reported on their own health over the previous year, with depressive symptoms and psychological wellbeing rated on a scale from 1 to 4, self-rated health measured on a scale from 1 to 5, and the metabolic risk score ranging from 0 to 5. At each assessment point, smoking status, levels of alcohol consumption and physical activity were recorded, the latter defined as exercising less than once a week.

The findings indicated that individuals exhibiting all three risky behaviours at any one time had significantly poorer health outcomes compared with those who had none of these behaviours. For example, depressive symptoms increased by 0.1 points, metabolic risk score rose by 0.53 points, psychological wellbeing dropped by 0.1 points, and self-rated health declined by 0.45 points.

Moreover, participants who maintained these unhealthy behaviours over the long term experienced even more pronounced health detriments. In this group, depressive symptoms increased by 0.38 points, metabolic risk score by 1.49 points, psychological wellbeing fell by 0.14 points and self-rated health decreased by 0.45 points.

Dr Tiia Kekalainen, a health scientist involved in the research, commented: “Non-communicable diseases such as heart disease and cancer cause almost three-quarters of deaths worldwide. But by following a healthy lifestyle, an individual can cut their risk of developing these illnesses and reduce their odds of an early death.

“Our findings highlight the importance of tackling risky health behaviours, such as smoking, heavy drinking and physical inactivity as early as possible to prevent the damage they do from building up over the years, culminating in poor mental and physical health later in life. However, it is never too late to change to healthier habits. Adopting healthier habits in midlife also has benefits for older age.”

The research team noted that the associations between risky behaviours and health outcomes were relatively consistent across the age range from 36 to 61 years. They stated, “the cumulative association of earlier risky behaviours exists already at age 36 and not only in the later phases of midlife,” demonstrating that detrimental health effects begin to accumulate relatively early in adulthood.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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3. <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2025-04-effects-lack-felt-age.html> - This article discusses how lack of exercise, smoking, and excessive drinking affect health, aligning with the study's findings on the early onset of health problems due to these behaviors.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/health/age-health-smoking-alcohol-exercise-b2739077.html> - Similar research reported in this article shows that having multiple unhealthy habits leads to worse mental and physical health outcomes, reinforcing the importance of early intervention.
5. <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20250313/Finnish-study-reveals-complex-link-between-physical-activity-and-longevity.aspx> - This study indicates a complex relationship between physical activity and health outcomes, supporting the idea that physical activity impacts overall health and longevity.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - While not directly providing corroborative evidence, this source likely contains the original article or related information about health behavior impacts on mental and physical well-being.
7. <https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/health/exact-age-you-start-feel-31506388> - Please view link - unable to able to access data