



Leisure Exercise Linked to Better Liver Health

Leisure time exercise prevented liver scarring better than movement at work, such as lifting or doing manual labor.

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A study has found that moderate, leisure [exercise](#) may help protect the liver from damage, but engaging in physical activity only during work hours does not confer the same benefits, according to a [VCU Health news release](#).

Published in [Hepatology Communications](#), the study compared physical activity during leisure time, such as brisk walking or playing sports, with movement at work, such as lifting, standing or doing manual labor.

Using data from the U.S. National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, the study examined three groups of people diagnosed with: metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD, formerly known as non-alcoholic [fatty liver disease](#)), MASLD and [alcohol](#) use, and alcohol-associated liver disease (ALD).

[MASLD](#) and its more severe form, MASH, are responsible for a growing proportion of advanced [liver disease](#) worldwide. Estimates suggest that around a third of people in the United States have MASLD, and about 5% have MASH. Over time, the buildup of fat in the liver can lead to serious complications, including severe liver scarring, known as [cirrhosis](#), and [liver cancer](#).

MASLD often occurs in people with obesity, type 2 diabetes and other metabolic conditions. With only two approved medications, management still largely depends on lifestyle changes such as weight loss and exercise.

According to VCU, people who had enough leisure time physical activity were less likely to develop cirrhosis. Movement at work, however, did not offer the same liver protection.

“Not all movement has the same impact on liver health,” said study coauthor, Juan Pablo Arab, MD, director of alcohol sciences at the VCU Stravitz-Sanyal Institute for Liver Disease and Metabolic Health, in the release. “Structured leisure activity appears to offer real protection, while physical activity at work does not.”

People who had at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week in their leisure time had a 40% to 45% lower risk of advanced fibrosis compared with those who were less active. The study adds to evidence that structured leisure time activity can protect the liver from damage.

These findings add to existing evidence regarding the “[physical activity](#) paradox,” which posits that physical activity at work is not as beneficial as recreational or fitness-focused exercise.

“Work activity often involves long hours of low-level exertion, with little recovery or variation,” Arab said. “Leisure exercise tends to be structured and includes rest, which may support better metabolism and lower inflammation.”

Researchers emphasize that findings can help guide public health campaigns to encourage recreational activity as a simple and inexpensive way to reduce the risk of liver disease.

“Our results underscore the importance of moving for your health, not just moving for your job,” Arab said. “Regular, intentional exercise outside of work may help protect your liver and your overall well-being.”

For more, click [#MASLD](#) or [#Exercise](#). There, you’ll see headlines such as “[Forget 10,000 Steps a Day. You Don’t Need That Many](#),” “[Exercise and Diet Combine to Improve Liver Health in People With MASH](#)” and “[Vigorous Physical Activity Linked to Lower MASLD Risk](#).”