

Here's to your health

Before drinking your next glass of wine, make sure to do your research on what it does for your health
by Karen Giles-Smith

Recently, red wine has received much media attention for its potential heart health benefits. If you enjoy drinking red wine, doing so may boost your heart health, however, the situation isn't clear cut. There are risks as well as benefits to alcohol consumption.

The research

Consumed in moderation, alcohol may protect the heart by increasing HDL or "good" cholesterol. Although beer and other types of alcohol may also increase HDL cholesterol, the strongest evidence is for wine. Red wine, in particular, may offer an additional heart health benefit because it contains resveratrol, a substance in grape skins that has antioxidant properties. Resveratrol may decrease blood pressure, improve circulation, and protect the heart, blood vessels and brain from age-related oxidative damage, potentially leading to a longer life. A study published in the September 2009 issue of *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* states that low to moderate alcohol consumption, especially of red wine, appears to reduce all causes of death. The researchers believe the results are due to the many bioactive compounds in red wine, especially resveratrol, which may activate the cells' survival pathways, remove compounds that can damage cells, and increase the blood supply to cells.

The recommendations

The American Heart Association's (AHA) recommendation regarding alcohol and cardiovascular disease is, "If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation" (americanheart.org). Moderation means one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. One drink is 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits, or 1 ounce of 100-proof spirits. According to the AHA, in general, alcohol doesn't appear to have any adverse affects unless consumed in excess.

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The risks

Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol can raise triglycerides and increase the risk of alcoholism, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, breast cancer, multiple organ damage, suicide and accidents. And drinking alcohol during pregnancy is not advised because it can cause birth defects. Because of these risks, The AHA cautions people not to start drinking if they don't already. For those who drink alcohol in moderation, it's important to discuss the benefits and risks with a physician.

Heavy metals

A U.K. study published last year in *Chemistry Central Journal* found red and white wines from most European nations contain potentially dangerous levels of at least seven heavy metals including vanadium, copper and manganese. Wines from France and Spain had some of the highest levels. The nations producing wines with safe levels of heavy metals were Italy, Brazil and Argentina.

According to Ron Perry, PhD, Professor in the Department of Horticulture at Michigan State University, high levels of heavy metals are most often found in wines from wineries that use older equipment and also in some U.S. wineries, such as in California, that have not updated their equipment.

"Many of our wineries in the U.S., particularly in Michigan, are new, relative to the European establishments," says Dr. Perry. "In general, wine produced in Michigan is of little concern regarding heavy metals. However, no one has done any studies to put our wines through a mass spec to define levels."

Sulfites

Sulfites are a group of sulfur-based compounds that may occur naturally or may be added to food as an enhancer or preservative. Sulfites are added during the winemaking process to help preserve wine's freshness and color. For those who have an allergy or sensitivity to sulfites, wine can cause severe headaches or an allergic response. "Overall, winemakers continue to try very hard to reduce the amount of total sulfur in wine and still produce a quality product that stores well," says Dr. Perry.

The bottom line

According to the AHA, people who don't already drink alcohol should not start; and those who currently drink alcohol

should do so in moderation. Although alcohol may offer heart health benefits, the AHA does not recommend drinking wine or any other form of alcohol in order to gain these potential benefits. There are effective ways to reduce the risk of heart disease that don't involve alcohol such as engaging in regular physical activity (which raises HDL, or "good" cholesterol), not smoking, eating right and maintaining a healthy weight. "Be sure to include a variety of brightly colored fruits and vegetables in your diet," says Emily Ostrowski, clinical dietitian with Sparrow Health System. "Foods such as blueberries, cherries, tomatoes, and carrots are a few of the many antioxidant-rich foods that may decrease your risk of certain diseases." Also, grape juice may offer some of the same heart-healthy benefits as wine.



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The Resident Winemakers

Dave and Deb Burgdorf made their first wine 20 years ago, a black raspberry and tart cherry blend they've perfected over the years at their home-based, Federal and State approved bonded winery in Haslett.

The Burgdorfs knew they were on to something good when the first batch of Perfection, a dessert wine, "made our face red and toes numb," says Dave.

The 2007 vintage received a double-gold award at the 2009 Indy International Wine Competition. This wine and more than 15 others are available for tasting and purchase at Burgdorf's Winery.

Customers also have the opportunity to make customized wine on site. The Burgdorfs use local ingredients and supplies whenever possible including grapes grown on their property, strawberries from Felzke Farms in DeWitt and blueberries from a supplier south of Battle Creek.

www.burgdorfwinery.com