

Let's drink to your health

Over the last decade, information has come out on the benefits of alcohol for one's health. It does decrease the severity of diabetes, the incidence of heart failure, stroke, coronary artery disease and Alzheimer's disease. With wine, particularly red wine, the polyphenol component has been shown to decrease the risk and rapidity of many cancers. However, alcohol does increase the risk of breast cancer with three drinks a day by 4 to 6 percent in women. Drinking significantly more than that increases the incidence of cancer to as much as 400 percent!

There is a J-shaped curve. That is, if one were to chart on a graph life expectancy with the number of drinks per day, those who do not drink will die earlier than those who drink in moderation. According to some studies, drinking 1.7 drinks a day decreases the incidence of coronary artery disease by 35 percent. With wine, one can increase that to 2 1/2 glasses a day. With more than that, there is a steady increase as a cause of mortality. Commonly, it is accidents, cancer and hemorrhagic strokes. High amounts of alcohol does take its toll on society with personal life to include occupation, relationships and family.

It has been shown that alcohol improves the level of the good cholesterol (HDL), slightly decreases the bad cholesterol (LDL) and does decrease importantly the very bad oxidized LDL cholesterol, which forms the plaque. The HDL (High Density

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Lipoprotein) cholesterol, which has some antioxidant activity and improves reversed cholesterol transport. In addition to this, alcohol decreases the platelet (small elements in the blood that cause clotting) stickiness, increases the dissolution of clots, improves sugar metabolism and decreases nitric oxide destruction. Nitric oxide nourishes the endothelium, causes vasodilatation and protection of atherosclerosis.

The dark color of wine is from phenolic compounds in the grape skin, making it reddish and cardio-protective. However, the effect lasts only 24 hours. Therefore, for this benefit, one must drink red wine on a daily basis. The darker the wine, the better, such as Pinot Noir and Cab Zinfandel.

Again, I do not routinely recommend alcohol and if I do, particularly red wine. As mentioned earlier, liver disease, seizures, pregnancy, addictive personality, strong family history of alcoholism, age less than 21, religion and if one needs their brain and reflexes at peak performance, they should not drink.