Is Red Wine Good for Your Health?

Some experts believe red wine has health benefits but too much is unhealthy. Get the facts on red wine and how it can impact your health.

You may have read that red wine is good for your health -- but don’t pop that cork too soon. Before you raise your glass, here are some things you’ll need to know.

Health benefits of alcohol

The most widely known benefits of alcohol may be a small increase in HDL (good) cholesterol and reducing blood clotting. Research continues on understanding the potential benefits more clearly. Red wine is thought to have even more benefits because it contains polyphenols and flavonoids. Both of these substances may have additional cardio-protective effects.

Resveratrol

A specific antioxidant, called resveratrol, is thought to be especially good for the heart. Resveratrol is found in the skin of red grapes. It’s also found in peanuts and some berries. Resveratrol has anti-inflammatory effects and also reduces blood clotting. Researchers believe resveratrol can slow tumor growth in some cancers. They also believe it can help prevent nerve cell damage and death. Studies on resveratrol have not yet been done on humans.
Alcohol Awareness

Is Red Wine Good for Your Health?  (continued)

Risks of alcohol
Excessive drinking can damage your liver, pancreas and nerve cells. Studies have shown alcohol increases a woman’s chances for breast cancer. Pregnant women should not drink any alcohol due to the potential harm to the baby.

Health problems
People with certain health problems shouldn’t drink alcohol. These problems include:

- High triglycerides
- Pancreatitis
- Liver disease
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure
- Depression
- Heart failure

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), moderate alcohol may reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke in some people, but more research is needed. The AHA cautions people not to start drinking if they do not already drink alcohol. The evidence is overwhelming that drinking may be unhealthy -- even risky -- for others.

Too much alcohol increases the risk for:

- High triglycerides
- High blood pressure
- Stroke
- Heart disease and heart attack
- Certain cancers
- Accidents
- Suicide
- Delivering children with birth defects
- Cirrhosis of the liver
- Inflammation of the pancreas
- Dementia

Diabetes
The AHA warns people with diabetes to be extra careful about alcohol. Any drinking should be done moderately and with a meal. Otherwise, alcohol can lower blood sugar to dangerous levels.

USDA recommendations
If you don’t drink, don’t start. Consuming alcohol can have beneficial or harmful effects depending on several factors such as amount consumed, age and unique characteristics to the person drinking the alcohol. The United States Department of Agriculture recommends moderate alcohol consumption. Moderate alcohol consumption is defined as up to 1 drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men. A serving is a 4-ounce glass of wine or a 12-ounce glass of beer. Drinking extra red wine won’t give you extra protection. It may do just the opposite and give you new health problems.

Many fruits and vegetables, as well as red grape juice, contain antioxidants. Although red wine may make HDL levels higher for some people, regular exercise can do the same thing. Work in up to 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week. Check with your doctor before you start or increase your physical activity level. Other things that may increase your HDL levels include lowering your blood pressure, controlling your weight, getting enough exercise and following a healthy diet.

SOURCES:
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Alcohol use and health. Accessed: 06/05/2012
Alcohol and Pregnancy Don’t Mix

During pregnancy, everything you consume affects your baby. Learn why you shouldn’t drink alcohol and how to get help if you need it.

Good parenting starts when you’re pregnant. The decisions you make during those 9 months can help give your baby a healthy start.

One healthy choice all moms-to-be should make is to avoid alcohol. It can lead to such problems as miscarriage or preterm birth. And it can cause other serious harm to your baby as well.

Any kind of alcohol can hurt your baby. There is no difference between wine, beer, liquor, and wine coolers. And no amount of alcohol has been proven safe during pregnancy.

**Drinking for two**

When you drink, alcohol passes through the placenta to the fetus. The mother's liver can process alcohol, but the baby's liver isn't fully developed, so it breaks down alcohol more slowly. This means the baby has a higher blood-alcohol level than the mother - and it stays high for longer.

Women who abuse alcohol during pregnancy have a higher risk of having a baby with fetal alcohol syndrome. This is a preventable cause of mental retardation. Fetal alcohol syndrome cannot be cured.

Children with this syndrome show a pattern of behavioral, mental, and physical problems. They may:
- Be born particularly small and fail to grow normally
- Have trouble eating and sleeping
- Have vision and hearing problems
- Have difficulty following directions and paying attention
- Have social problems

**A time for change**

Pregnancy is a great chance to make lifestyle changes that are good for you and your baby. As your baby grows inside you, he or she is affected by everything you put in your body. That includes food, drinks, medicines, and herbal supplements. Some of these can be very dangerous to the life growing inside of you, so it's important to learn what is and is not safe during pregnancy.

In addition to avoiding alcohol, here are some other steps you can take to support a healthy pregnancy, mommy, and baby:
- Talk with your doctor about a healthy exercise routine.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Try to eat a healthful diet.
- Do not use illicit drugs.
- Do not smoke or otherwise use tobacco, and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Check with your doctor before using any medicines, herbs, or supplements.
Getting help
If you find it hard to stop drinking, talk with your doctor. You can also get help from the following organizations:

- Alcoholics Anonymous: www.aa.org
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence: 800-NCA-CALL or visit www.ncadd.org
- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: 301-443-3860 or visit www.niaaa.nih.gov
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration. Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator: 800-662-HELP or visit www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

When Your Partner Has a Drinking Problem

Your partner has a drinking problem. What can you do to help? Learn about the effects of alcoholism on a relationship and how to respond.

Are you on marital eggshells because your spouse drinks too much? It’s emotionally trying to not know what you’ll face when you come home. Is she sleeping it off? Is he ready for a fight? Numb? Part of you wants to be supportive and help your partner. Another part wants to run away. Your partner has an alcohol abuse problem. Should you confront your spouse? Should you leave? How can you even begin to deal with this problem?

When one partner in a relationship has a drinking problem, the effects are widespread. They may lead to more conflict, raise the risk of violence and infidelity, and cause money and intimacy problems. The sober partner is faced with increasing responsibility to keep the household running, especially when there are children in the mix. It can be an enormous burden.

What can be done?
How you respond to your partner’s drinking has a great impact on his or her potential for recovery. Don’t try to hide it, control it, or make excuses for him or her. These behaviors make it possible for him or her to keep drinking. It’s called enabling. Your partner will need to experience firsthand the results of his or her drinking before he or she will realize a change is needed.

The first steps to helping an alcoholic have more to do with restraint than action:

- **Don’t blame yourself.** Alcoholism is a disease.
- **Don’t blame your partner.** Alcoholism is a disease.
- **Don’t pretend the problem doesn’t exist.** Don’t make rationalizations for it.
Alcoholism is a lifelong disease, but it can often be controlled through abstinence. It’s important to get professional help, though. You can’t do it alone and neither can your partner.

Professional counseling techniques, such as alcohol-focused behavioral couples therapy, or ABCT, help the drinker learn life-coping skills. They also help the partner support efforts to change. Self-help support programs like Alcoholics Anonymous (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org) can help people with alcoholism change this destructive habit. So can private or group therapy. But often, the alcoholic won’t accept help until he or she hits bottom.

Meanwhile, you can get support and counseling to help you deal with the stress of living with a partner with alcoholism. Al-Anon and other organizations hold support meetings. They can help direct you to other important sources of assistance for you and for your partner - when he or she is ready. Take the first step. Talk to your own doctor, contact your workplace Employee Assistance Program (EAP), or your local office of Al-Anon (www.alanon.org).

SOURCES:
• Al-anon. Understanding alcoholism. Accessed: 01/03/2008
• National Healthy Marriage Resource Center. Frequently asked questions about alcohol and marriage. Accessed: 01/03/2011
• National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. Alcohol problems in intimate relationships: identification and intervention. Accessed: 01/03/2011
• American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Substance abuse and intimate relationships. Accessed: 01/03/2011