



## Alcohol, Wine and Cardiovascular Disease

### Are there cardiovascular risks associated with drinking alcohol?

Drinking too much alcohol can raise the levels of some fats in the blood (triglycerides) (tri-GLIS'er-idz). It can also lead to high blood pressure, heart failure and an increased calorie intake. (Consuming too many calories can lead to obesity and a higher risk of developing diabetes.) Excessive drinking and binge drinking can lead to stroke. Other serious problems include fetal alcohol syndrome, cardiomyopathy (kar"de-o-mi-OP'ah-the), cardiac arrhythmia (ah-RITH'me-ah) and sudden cardiac death.

### AHA Recommendation

If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. This means an average of one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. (A drink is one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of 80-proof spirits, or 1 oz. of 100-proof spirits.) **Drinking more alcohol increases such dangers as alcoholism, high blood pressure, obesity, stroke, breast cancer, suicide and accidents. Also, it's not possible to predict in which people alcoholism will become a problem. Given these and other risks, the American Heart Association cautions people NOT to start drinking ... if they do not already drink alcohol. Consult your doctor on the benefits and risks of consuming alcohol in moderation.**

### What about red wine and heart disease?

Over the past several decades, many studies have been published in science journals about how drinking alcohol may be associated with reduced mortality due to heart disease in some populations. Some researchers have suggested that the benefit may be due to wine, especially red wine. Others are examining the potential benefits of components in red wine such as flavonoids (FLAV'oh-noidz) and other antioxidants (an"tih-OK'sih-dants) in reducing heart disease risk. Some of these components may be found in other foods such as grapes or red grape juice. The linkage reported in many of these studies may be due to other lifestyle factors rather than alcohol. Such factors may include increased physical activity, and a diet high in fruits and vegetables and lower in saturated fats. No direct comparison trials have been done to determine the specific effect of wine or other alcohol on the risk of developing heart disease or stroke.

### Are there potential benefits of drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages?

Research is being done to find out what the apparent benefits of drinking wine or alcohol in some populations may be due to, including the role of antioxidants, an increase in HDL ("good") cholesterol or anti-clotting properties. Clinical trials of other antioxidants such as vitamin E have not shown any cardio-protective effect. Also, even if they were protective, antioxidants can be obtained from many fruits and vegetables, including red grape juice.

The best-known effect of alcohol is a small increase in HDL cholesterol. However, regular physical activity is another effective way to raise HDL cholesterol, and niacin can be prescribed to raise it to a greater degree. Alcohol or some substances such as resveratrol (res-VAIR'ah-trol) found in alcoholic beverages may prevent platelets in the blood from sticking together. That may reduce clot formation and reduce the risk of heart attack or stroke. (Aspirin may help reduce blood clotting in a similar way.) How alcohol or wine affects cardiovascular risk merits further research, but right

now the American Heart Association does not recommend drinking wine or any other form of alcohol to gain these potential benefits. The AHA does recommend that to reduce your risk you should talk to your doctor about lowering your cholesterol and blood pressure, controlling your weight, getting enough physical activity and following a healthy diet. There is no scientific proof that drinking wine or any other alcoholic beverage can replace these conventional measures.

#### **What about alcohol and pregnancy?**

Pregnant women shouldn't drink alcohol in any form. It can harm the baby seriously, including causing birth defects.

#### **What about alcohol and aspirin?**

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration warns that people who take aspirin regularly should not drink alcohol. Heart disease patients should stop drinking and keep taking aspirin if their doctor prescribed it for their heart condition. **Patients should not stop taking aspirin without first talking to their doctor.**

#### **Related AHA publications:**

- [Easy Food Tips for Heart-Healthy Eating \(also in Spanish\)](#)

#### **Related AHA Scientific Statements:**

[Diet/Nutrition](#)

#### **See also:**

[Antioxidants](#)  
[Antiplatelet Agents](#)  
[Arrhythmias](#)  
[Aspirin in Heart Attack and Stroke Prevention](#)  
[Cardiomyopathy](#)  
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[Cocaine, Marijuana and Other Drugs](#)  
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