

Splurge - Volume 4 Issue 11 (November 2009)

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THE “VERITAS” IN THE VINO

So begins the holiday season, traditionally a time of calorie-laden foods, excess and a slowing of exercise habits. However, there's only so much revelry to go around before your one extra helping turns into an extra five pounds around the midsection. You can always make healthy choices while having a good time. One of the most frequent topics my patients ask about is drinking alcohol and red wine in particular. Many medical researchers have studied the health benefits and detriments of drinking alcoholic beverages – especially red wine, which was thought to have preventative and curative effects on the heart.

First off, I'll dispel a few myths and give you a few tips. Red wine is preferable to other types of alcohol due to the volume and ratio of various antioxidants and a substance called resveratrol. Resveratrol itself is shown to add protection to the walls of the arteries, reduce inflammation in the vessels and (perhaps) protect against obesity and diabetes. Red wine contains more antioxidants and resveratrol than white wine or other kinds of alcohol due to the fermenting process the vintners go through when creating the wine.

Similar healthful properties can be found in grape juice, blueberries, beer, tea and cocoa, but red wine contains a higher concentration. Scientists are now looking at isolating resveratrol for consumption in capsule form as a supplement. The level of that resveratrol concentration will be more than 1,000 times more than in red wine. Future studies will determine whether this encapsulated resveratrol has a similar benefit to red wine, or if other components of the wine are essential to delivering the protective qualities.

This is where it all gets tricky. Red wine helps the heart by raising the HDL cholesterol (the “good” kind), while reducing the LDL cholesterol (the “bad” kind) levels. Alcohol can reduce the incidence of blood clots forming in the arteries. Moderate alcohol consumption is also thought to assist in the healing of arterial damage. For many people, a glass of red wine with dinner can be a part of a healthy lifestyle especially when combined with regular exercise and a nutritional diet (for example, the Mediterranean diet). Moderate drinking is defined as two drinks per day for a man, one drink (5 oz. wine) for a woman.

One popular myth is that because of the health benefits of red wine, a person has a free pass to drink as much wine as possible. So let me burst that bubble and state some facts. If you find yourself drinking more than two glasses of wine a day, you are actually negating the positive qualities of the wine you just consumed. Alcohol is, of course, addictive, and anyone with a history of addiction in their personal or family history should avoid drinking alcohol of any kind. You and your physician can come up with a plan for heart health customized for you – there are other ways to achieve the same benefits.

Drinking alcohol can lead to multiple health issues beyond possible addiction. Excessive drinking can exacerbate or increase high blood pressure, liver damage, kidney problems, obesity, cardiomyopathy and

certain cancers. Pregnant women and those with a history of seizures or heart failure should avoid alcohol completely.

People who drink too much tend to be accident-prone, so make sure to always avoid driving after consuming alcohol. If you need a ride, call a friend, family member or taxi service (or Saferiders in Wichita) to take you home safely. If you have questions about alcohol and your health, consult your physician.

Most importantly, keep an eye on yourself. Keep in mind that if you have concerns about how much you're drinking, or trouble reducing your level or frequency of consumption, there are avenues of help and support for you if you need them.

Listen to Dr. Galichia's Radio Show – "Take Your Health to Heart" every Saturday from 11 AM to Noon on 1480 KQAM in Wichita. If you have any medically related questions, please call us during the LIVE broadcast at 1-800-TALK-997 or 1-800-825-5997. You can also e-mail your questions anytime to **GalichiaRadio@Galichia.com**. We would love to hear from you!!!

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