What kinds of alcohol are best for health? [1]

Dear Alice,

Do any alcohols have any specific benefits? As in, is tequila better than vodka? And is red wine the best choice because of its antioxidants?

Answer

Dear Reader,

After opening a bottle of wine, French speakers commonly offer a toast à votre santé, or to your health. In addition to these well wishes, there's some evidence that moderate drinking may actually be good for your health. The research is still a bit muddled, but what you drink seems to matter less than how much.

Red wine has received a lot of publicity for its potential to improve heart health. As you suggested, many researchers link these benefits to the antioxidants present in wine in the form of resveratrol. For more background on the role of resveratrol in cardiovascular health, check out Is wine a fruit serving? [2] in the Go Ask Alice! Nutrition and Physical Activity [3] archive. In the Copenhagen Heart Study, Danes who drank red wine had only half the risk of dying from heart disease compared to Danes who didn't drink red wine. Some American studies confirm this finding, while other research indicates similar health benefits for drinkers of white wine, beer, and liquor. There is less evidence touting the health benefits of alcoholic drinks other than red wine. Detractors from the red wine hypothesis argue that it's not the source of the alcohol, grape or grain, that matters? instead, what matters is how much you drink.

As with many of life's pleasures, enjoying the benefits of alcohol requires a healthy dose of moderation. A sip of celebratory champagne or the occasional happy hour drink won't do much to change your overall health. Drink too much, and alcohol may have a myriad of negative effects on physical and mental health including heart and liver damage, and increased risk of cancer, depression, violence, and relationship troubles. To see any benefit from alcohol, your intake has to be somewhere in the middle. Imbibing a small amount of alcohol each day (one drink for women and up to two drinks for men) may protect against heart trouble, diabetes, and gallstones.

Folks who don't drink already should not be misled by these potential health benefits. There are plenty of non-alcoholic ways to reduce your risk of heart disease and diabetes such as eating a well-balanced diet and keeping physically active. As such, the American Heart Association
does not recommend that you start drinking to improve your health.

You can find answers to your other queries in the Go Ask Alice! archives for Alcohol & Other Drugs. For more information about safe levels of alcoholic consumption, take a look at How much alcohol a day? [5]. To find out how "one drink" is measured, check out Alcohol poisoning [6].

Should you choose to raise a glass? salud!

Alice!
Category:
Alcohol & Other Drugs [7]
Alcohol [8]

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