

# HEALTH BENEFITS OF RED WINE

BY PROF EU KONG WENG

Besides tickling your palate, imbibing the mauve beverage can do wonders for your health, not to mention the personal enjoyment from a glass or two.



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**R**ed wine has been found to provide remarkable benefits to the heart such as lowering bad cholesterol, warding off dementia, offering protection against cancer and even prolonging one's lifespan.

Do note however that these benefits only apply when it is consumed in moderation, which the US Department of Agriculture defines as "up to one glass per day for women and two glasses per day for men."

Such conclusions first came to the fore in 1991 with what was known as the 'French Paradox'. That was when it was revealed that coronary artery disease rates among French men were found to be significantly lower than American men. That was despite the former consuming a higher intake of saturated animal fat than their American counterparts. It was eventually traced to red wine which is a staple of French diet.

## Resveratrol In Wine

The health benefits linked to moderate wine consumption have been attributed to resveratrol, an antioxidant found in plants, which is used to fight off bacteria and fungi and also as protection from ultraviolet light.

Red wine contains more resveratrol than white wine as it is fermented with the skins, where most of the resveratrol is found.

Resveratrol is the key ingredient in wine that helps prevent damage to blood vessels, reduces low-density lipoproteins (LDL) and 'bad' cholesterol as well as prevents blood clots. Many research papers have also shown that a few glasses of wine a week can protect women against high blood pressure and a myriad of other disorders.

### Prevents Dementia

Several research papers have shown that the consumption of a glass of red wine a day can ward off neuro-degenerative brain diseases. This is largely due to stimulating effect resveratrol has on an enzyme in the brain involved in nerve regeneration, thus preventing dementia or at least delaying the onset of it.

### Improves Brain Function

French researchers have found that women after 50 who drank two or more glasses of wine a day are 2.5 times more likely to score in the top 10% in tests.

### Reducing Risk Of Depression

Spanish researchers have found that drinking a glass of wine a day significantly lowers a person's risk of depression, even after taking lifestyle factors into account.

### Anti-Aging

The Harvard Medical School has reported that red wine consumed in moderation has anti-aging properties which can improve health and increase a person's life span due to the presence of resveratrol.

### Reduces Heart Attacks

People who drink up to two glasses of red wine a day are less likely to die of a heart attack than those who do not drink the beverage. Moderate drinking is also associated with improved chances of surviving a heart attack.

### Prevents Cancer

It has been well documented that moderate consumption of red wine can reduce the rate of bowel tumours by approximately 50%. Seattle researchers found a definite association between red wine consumption and lowered prostate cancer risk. Kaiser Permanente, an integrated managed care consortium, based in Oakland, California, United States, also claimed that drinking red wine reduces lung cancer risk, particularly among smokers.

### Prevents Blindness

The out-of-control growth of blood vessels in the eye is the leading cause of blindness and this can be prevented by drinking red wine.



Swirling dispels some of the alcohol content and helps to release more of its natural aroma.

#### Prevents Diabetes

Resveratrol has also been shown to improve sensitivity to insulin (the hormone responsible for controlling blood sugar), thereby helping to thwart diabetes.

#### Reduces Food Poisoning

A glass or two of wine with a meal kills the bacteria responsible for almost all illnesses caused by food.

#### A Cautionary Note

Most of these health benefits discussed are associated with moderate wine consumption. So one should not be tempted to overdo it as paradoxically, over-consumption can lead to serious health disorders such as cancer, heart disease, stroke and infertility.

Although moderate wine drinking does confer significant health benefits, other factors do come into play too. The extraordinary benefits of drinking wine will be less apparent if a person has a driven lifestyle high on stress and with extreme junk food as the primary diet. It is only when the eating habits are aligned with a healthy lifestyle that the benefits of wine become pronounced.

#### How To Taste Wines

Learning to taste wines is a straightforward adventure that can be both enjoyable and challenging. There are three basic components in wine tasting: Sight, smell and taste. Remember that one can smell thousands of unique scents, but your taste

perception is limited to salty, sweet, sour and bitter. It is the combination of smell and taste that allows us to discern flavour.

#### Sight

Using a white or light background, tilt the glass of wine at a 45-degree angle. Observe the colour and clarity of the contents. White wines have colours such as green, gold or straw hues. Red wines have colours such as deep purple, cherry or hints of brown. Next swirl the glass several times and observe the legs that run down the side of the glass. The thicker the legs, the thicker the body. Also look if there are sediments which are not only harmless but a sign of quality. An older wine will always form some sediment and careful pouring or decanting is recommended.

#### Smell

Swirl the glass for 10-12 seconds. If it is white wine, you will smell apples, pears, peaches, lemon or lime. If it is red wine, one would usually smell cherry, raspberry, blueberry or blackberry. Swirling dispels some of the alcohol content and helps to release more of its natural aroma, which is an excellent indicator of quality.

#### Taste

Take a sip of the wine and swirl it in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing. Determine if it is light-bodied (like water), medium-bodied (like milk) or full-bodied (like cream). Is the wine sweet, fruity, dry, minty or even peppery? What is your



last impression of the wine, otherwise known as the after taste? Is it short-lived or does it linger?

#### The Overall Impression

This is your final perception of the wine you have tasted. Was it sweet, sour or bitter? Is it well balanced? How was the wine's acidity? Does it taste better with cheese, bread or a meal? And of course, will you drink this again?

#### The Wine Glass

A wine glass is a type of glass stemware used to drink and taste wine. It is composed of the bowl, the stem and the foot. Selection of the appropriate glass is important as the glass shape can influence its perception.

Traditionally the proper way to drink from a wine glass is to grasp it by the stem in order to avoid finger prints on the bowl and more importantly to prevent the temperature of the wine from being affected by body heat, especially when drinking chilled white wine and champagne.

Wine glasses are either made of lead crystal or regular glass. Lead crystal generally has a higher index of refraction which gives the stemware a sparkle. Lead crystal is also rougher than glass, allowing the wine to 'breathe' more efficiently when swirled.

Red wine glasses are characterized by their rounder, wider bowl, which increases the rate of oxidation. As oxygen from the air interacts with the wine, flavour and aroma are subtly altered and emitted.

White wine glasses vary enormously in shapes and sizes and are generally smaller than those for reds. White wine is usually best served only slightly oxidized so as not to mask its delicate nuances. Hence the rounder, wider bowl is not typical in white wine glasses.

Champagne flutes are characterized by a long stem and a tall, narrow bowl in order to keep the contents sparkling. It also adds to the aesthetic appeal of champagne, allowing the bubbles to travel further giving a more pleasant visual appeal.

#### Is There Such A Thing As A Cheap Wine?

Can you really taste the difference between a \$20 and a \$200 bottle of wine? Wine enjoyment is such a subjective experience and not an exact science. There is always a misconception that an expensive bottle of red wine must be good. But in reality, there are so many elements and not just the cost that determine what is a good bottle of wine. These elements include label, colour, price, food and most importantly, one's personal experience and preference.

Frederic Brochet, a researcher from Bordeaux in 2001, invited 57 wine 'experts' to evaluate two glasses of red wine, except that the wines were actually white but tinted red with colouring. It was hilarious when some of the 'experts' started describing the 'red' wine in languages typically used to describe red wine.

Brochet thus concluded that wine drinking also has a well-known 'psychological phenomenon' and you tend to taste what you expect to taste. The 'experts' were expecting to taste a red wine, and of course they did.

#### Reflections

Personally, at the end of the day, what matters most when drinking wine is who are you enjoying your wine with; where are you enjoying this wine and what is the occasion? It is certainly not how cheap or expensive the wine is; not the vintage and definitely not whether it is a 'grand cru' or not. Maybe it is that simple glass of Chianti Classico you sipped on last week. But since it is your daughter's 21st birthday, it just may be comparable to a Chateau Mouton-Rothschild.

However, this does not mean we should just consume cheap wine exclusively and forget the rest. Expectations and moments are vital to the wine experience as what is in the bottle. The right wine (and not necessary the expensive kind) has the potential to bring back fond memories and add colour to our life experiences.

And I will drink to that, cheers! 🍷



#### About The Writer

Professor Eu Kong Weng is a Medical Director and Senior Consultant Surgeon at Colorectal Surgeons, Inc (Pte Ltd). He is also a Visiting Consultant at Singapore General Hospital and Adjunct Professor at Duke-NUS.