



Your Health

Alcohol: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly©

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Most of us enjoy a glass of wine with dinner, or perhaps a nightcap before bed. During this week's article, we'll look at some of the benefits alcohol can have on the body, and some of the dangers drinking too much can have.

Depending on whom you ask, drinking can be a blessing or a curse. Some people will dub drinking as therapeutic whilst others have had alcohol ruin their lives. A cocktail, a beer or a glass of wine can be both relaxing and good for the heart but these drinks can also play a role in cancer development, liver and heart damage and depression.

You may have noticed that alcohol can both be good and bad for the heart, so the question is – why? The answer is actually simple. Alcohol can have positive health effects when drunk in moderation. Let's begin by talking about the benefits of alcohol and how it can actually be good for your health.

According to Harvard University, more than 100 studies have shown that moderate drinking (which is around 1-2 drinks a day), can decrease the risk of heart attacks, clot-caused strokes and overall cardiovascular diseases. Drinking alcohol in a reasonable amount raises your levels of HDL, which is also known as your good cholesterol. This can decrease your levels of bad cholesterol and prevent high blood pressure. Some alcoholic drinks are better at protecting you from cardiovascular diseases than others. Red wine is famously known to be particularly good at reducing your blood pressure. The reason for this is because red wine contains a high concentration of a chemical known as polyphenols. These help to decrease blood pressure. Lastly, on top of cardiovascular benefits, moderate alcohol consumption has been proven to decrease the risk of developing dementia. This is because of the cardiovascular effects described earlier. Moderate alcohol intake can protect the blood vessels in the brain and heart, which leads to a healthy brain function.

Now onto the disadvantages of alcohol: this is almost always due to drinking too much alcohol. Heavy drinking can cause liver inflammation and scarring. You may have heard of alcoholic hepatitis or cirrhosis – this is usually a result of years of excess alcohol

consumption. Interestingly, whilst drinking alcohol in moderation can decrease blood pressure, excess drinking can actually increase it. High blood pressure can lead to heart muscle damage and increase the risk of strokes. Furthermore, according to Harvard, high alcohol intake can lead to an increased risk of cancer development. There have been studies linking high alcohol intake with breast, colon, mouth and liver cancers. If that wasn't enough, binge drinking can also lead to an increased risk of osteoporosis. This is a condition where your bones become weak and brittle. Finally, too much alcohol can also lead to disrupted sleep patterns, weight gain and impeded judgments.

This week's advice: Even too much water can be bad for you! Remember: everything in moderation.

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