

Alcohol

Is it good or bad?

Alcohol is not necessary for good health but if you do drink it, it should be in moderation.

Moderate consumption

May have a positive effect and protect against heart disease. Reasonable amounts of alcohol may:

- Increase HDL ('good') cholesterol.
- Have an anti-clotting effect on blood.

This protective effect is greatest in men over 40 and post-menopausal women as they are the highest risk groups. There is little protective effect in younger people as they are generally not at high risk for heart disease.

Excessive consumption:

Drinking too much alcohol increases health dangers, including high blood pressure, heart failure and increased levels of triglycerides (a type of fat in the blood). Binge drinking can lead to a stroke.

Other serious effects are heart muscle damage, heart rhythm disturbances and sudden cardiac death. It may also contribute to the development of obesity, diabetes and liver disease.

HSFSA recommendation:

Drinking alcohol to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease is not recommended. However, if alcohol is consumed, it should be limited to:

- 2 drinks/day for men
- 1 drink/day for women

Drinking 3 or more alcoholic drinks/day increases the risk of high blood pressure, so more is not recommended.

One drink is equivalent to:

- 340ml beer
- 120ml wine
- 60ml sherry
- 25ml spirits (whisky, brandy, vodka, gin etc.)
- 25ml liqueur

Who should avoid alcohol?

It is not advised for people who:

- Don't consume alcohol on a regular basis.
- Are pregnant (as it may cause birth defects).
- Have a history of liver disease, pancreatitis, heart failure, uncontrolled high blood pressure or high triglyceride levels.
- Are overweight.
- Are on medication that reacts with alcohol.

Does wine have advantages over other alcoholic drinks?

The potential cardioprotective substances in wine (especially red wine) may be:

Resveratrol, found in grape skins, may increase HDL ('good') cholesterol and prevent platelets in the blood from sticking together. It may also reduce LDL ('bad') cholesterol oxidation (a process that causes damage and narrowing of arteries).

Flavonoids may provide antioxidant properties and may help prevent blood cholesterol deposits in arteries.

What are better choices?

Try to limit your energy intake by opting for "healthier" alcoholic drinks.

Avoid

- Sweet wine
- Sherry
- Liqueurs
- Spirits with soft drinks
- High calorie beers or ciders
- Spirit coolers
- Dom Pedro's or Irish coffees

Rather order

- Dry wine
- Wine spritzer
- Spirits with water, soda or diet soft drinks
- Light beers

This is one in a series of brochures. For the full series and more heart smart information call the Heart Mark Diet Line on 0860 223 222 or visit www.heartfoundation.co.za.

