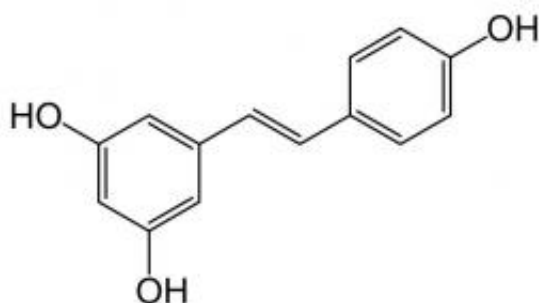


Diets rich in antioxidant resveratrol fail to reduce deaths, heart disease or cancer

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Skeletal formula of trans-resveratrol. Image: Wikipedia

A study of Italians who consume a diet rich in resveratrol—the compound found in red wine, dark chocolate and berries—finds they live no longer than and are just as likely to develop cardiovascular disease or cancer as those who eat or drink smaller amounts of the antioxidant.

"The story of resveratrol turns out to be another case where you get a lot of hype about health benefits that doesn't stand the test of time," says Richard D. Semba, M.D., M.P.H., a professor of ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and leader of the study described May 12 in *JAMA Internal Medicine*. "The thinking was that certain foods are good for you because they contain resveratrol. We didn't find that at all."

Despite the negative results, Semba says, studies have shown that consumption of [red wine](#), [dark chocolate](#) and berries does reduce inflammation in some people and still appears to protect the heart. "It's just that the benefits, if they are there, must come from other polyphenols or substances found in those foodstuffs," he says. "These are complex foods, and all we really know from our study is that the benefits are probably not due to resveratrol."

The new study did not include people taking resveratrol supplements, though few studies thus far have found benefits associated with them.

Semba is part of an international team of researchers that for 15 years has studied the effects of aging in a group of people who live in the Chianti region of Italy. For the current study, the researchers analyzed 24 hours of [urine samples](#) from 783 people over the age of 65 for metabolites of resveratrol. After accounting for such factors as age and gender, the people with the highest concentration of resveratrol metabolites were no less likely to have died of any cause than those with no resveratrol found in their urine. The concentration of resveratrol was not associated with inflammatory markers, [cardiovascular disease](#) or cancer rates.

Semba and his colleagues used advanced mass spectrometry to analyze the urine samples.

The study participants make up a random group of people living in Tuscany where supplement use is uncommon and consumption of red wine—a specialty of the region—is the norm. The study participants were not on any prescribed diet.

Resveratrol is also found in relatively large amounts in grapes, peanuts and certain Asiatic plant roots. Excitement over its [health benefits](#) followed studies documenting anti-inflammatory effects in lower

organisms and increased lifespan in mice fed a high-calorie diet rich in the compound.

The so-called "French paradox," in which a low incidence of coronary heart disease occurs in the presence of a high dietary intake of cholesterol and saturated fat in France, has been attributed to the regular consumption of [resveratrol](#) and other polyphenols found in red wine.

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