

Toasting your health: Take care with alcohol consumption

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(Medical Xpress)—The holidays are a time to consume—food, gifts, and spirits. Here are a few alcohol-related story ideas from The Methodist Hospital. Because alcohol's effects on human physiology are complex, advice about is often contradictory.

Alcohol associated with breast cancer risk

Recent studies have shown a relationship between [alcohol intake](#) and breast cancer, says Tejal Patel, M.D., a Methodist Cancer Center medical oncologist. In a recently published study of 106,000 women, the more women drank, the more likely they were to develop breast cancer at some point in their lives, up to cumulative increased risk of 15 percent for women who consumed a weekly average of six drinks, or 84 grams of alcohol. A 12 oz beer, 5 oz wine or 1.5 oz liquor contains about 14 g of alcohol.

Patel says is not known how alcohol might cause or contribute to the development of breast cancer. A number of [biological mechanisms](#) have been suggested, including an increase in estrogen and [androgen levels](#), an increase in the rates of DNA damage, or an increase in the [genetic susceptibility](#) of [mammary glands](#) to carcinogenesis.

Other research suggests an association between alcohol and cancers of the mouth, esophagus, larynx, pharynx and liver.

It's not just red wine—white wine, beer, and vodka can raise HDL too

Despite popular notions it's just red wine that positively impacts [cholesterol levels](#), any alcohol will do, says metabolic disease expert Henry Pownall, Ph.D., a chemist who has been studying fatty acid and cholesterol metabolism for over four decades. "Recent metastudies have shown there's nothing magical about red wine," Pownall says. "You see the same effects from drinking small amounts of other kinds of alcohol."

Pownall explains it is alcohol itself—ethanol—that is responsible. Ethanol is broken down into acetic acid (vinegar) in cells, and it's acetic acid that cranks up processes that increase production of good [HDL cholesterol](#). It is not clear whether acetic alone also lowers bad LDL cholesterol.

Pownall stresses moderation. "One small drink for an average-sized woman, once a day, and one-and-a-half to two small drinks for an average-sized man are recommended to reduce long-term atherosclerosis risk," Pownall says.

Pownall is the director of atherosclerosis and lipoprotein research at The Methodist Hospital Research Institute.

What's good for your heart may not be good for your waistline

You exercise twice a week, eliminate fatty foods from your diet, yet you are still seeing the effects on your waistline. Chances are you could be drinking rather than eating too many calories. The empty calories from alcohol can add up fast, and alcohol lowers your inhibitions, meaning your resistance to high-calorie foods becomes futile.

"Reduce or cut out alcohol consumption," says Kari Kooi, a registered dietician at The Methodist Hospital. "Increased alcohol consumption will lead to unwanted pounds and expanded waistlines."

Liquid calories do not satisfy hunger and can quickly lead to weight gain when consumed in excess. What's more, alcoholic drinks can cause blood sugar swings that leave you even hungrier. Consume alcohol in moderation since it has 7 calories per gram, which is very close to the 9 calories per gram in fat. The calories can add up fast. The best hydration choice is water.

Provided by The Methodist Hospital System

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