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Responsible Wine Consumption Linked to Lower Chance of Heart Attack in Women, Study Finds

Women who frequently drink moderate amounts of wine are nearly half as likely to have a heart attack as women who abstain

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Drinking moderate amounts of alcohol can benefit one's circulation and overall heart health, according to new research published in the May 2007 issue of the journal *Addiction*. In the study, scientists at the University of Buffalo found that drinking alcohol is associated with a lower risk of heart attack in women.

While it's generally accepted that drinking alcohol responsibly is associated with a lower risk of cardiovascular diseases, few studies have examined the drinking behaviors of women in particular, explained Prof. Joan Dorn of the department of Social and Preventative Medicine at the university, who led the study. Dorn, whose previous research found that drinking wine is not directly related to weight gain, this time concluded that wine drinkers had a 44 percent lower risk of heart attack when compared to nondrinkers, and also had a lower risk than drinkers of beer or spirits.

"This isn't a reason to take two glasses of wine with two aspirin right before bed," cautioned Dorn. "It doesn't work like that. The wine-drinking women, who showed the most protection, were the ones who drank responsibly, such as a glass of wine with lunch, one with dinner, and maybe one between then and bedtime," she explained.

The research pulled data on participants in the Western New York Health Study, which ran from 1996 to 2001 and examined alcohol drinking and the impact on the risk of chronic diseases. A total of 1,885 women, ranging in age from 35 to 69 years old, were included in the analysis, and of those, 320 had previously survived a heart attack.

All of the women were drawn from the registers of 12 hospitals in the New York counties of Erie and Niagara. The women were interviewed about their alcohol habits, such as what, how often and how much they drank. Women who did not prefer one type of drink to another were classified as mixed-pattern drinkers.

The researchers compared the drinking habits of the women who hadn't had heart attacks to those who did, and came up with risk factors based on consumption habits. They found that wine-drinking women, as well as mixed-pattern drinkers, were at a 44 percent lower risk of having a heart attack than nondrinkers. Women who preferred beer or liquor also showed a lower risk than abstainers, at 26 percent and 12 percent lower risk, respectively.

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Frequency of alcohol consumption also had an effect, as women who drank daily were at 52 percent lower risk when compared to nondrinkers. While those who drank only a few times a week or a few times a month showed a reduced risk of heart attack, it wasn't to the same degree as those who drank daily.

The protective effect of alcohol increased with the amount of drinks per day, as well. Women who had one to two drinks per day were 33 percent less likely to have a heart attack than abstainers, and women who drank two to three drinks per day had a 40 percent lower risk. Women who had three or more drinks per day were at the highest level of protection, with a 48 percent lower risk of heart attack. Dorn added, though, that the women in this category never drank this much in one sitting, as it would lead to intoxication, a risk factor for heart attacks. Instead the women spread out their consumption during the day.

"The women in this category had a familiarity with proper wine consumption," Dorn said. "Women who drank and felt intoxicated many times a month were, in some cases, up to six times more likely to have a heart attack than women who didn't drink."

"Conventional advice is for those who don't drink, not to start," added Dorn. "And for those that do, consult your doctor before changing your behavior."

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