



by Jeffrey Maxwell

## According to Science

“Red wine is good for you because it helps to lower the risk of heart disease.” If you have looked at mainstream health articles, you probably have run into one that makes claims similar to this. Or perhaps, you have heard somebody toasting to this chant. But is red wine really as wonderful thing as the media and world make it out to be?

First off, what is it about red wine that the world says makes it good for your heart? WebMD, a popular online health forum, tells us that it is a property called [resveratrol](#). They are correct. Not only does red wine contain resveratrol, but also other healthful properties called flavonoids that help with not only heart disease, but other ailments as well.

Another term thrown around to hail the reasons why we should drink wine consistently is “The French Paradox.” In brief, it was noted that while the French

consume a bit more saturated fats than Americans, their overall incidence of coronary heart disease is lower. Then the idea became popular that the reason must be because the French drink more red wine. Are these things conclusive evidence that a healthy measure to adopt in our lifestyle is to drink moderate levels of red wine? Let us look more closely at the mystery of the French paradox.

First of all, the French are not immune from heart disease. As a matter of fact, according to the National Center for Biotechnology, [ischemic heart disease has risen to first place in France as cause of death](#). That would be enough to invalidate the argument of the French paradox, alone. [HealthAssist](#) has an interesting article about this subject and brings out other valid reasons why the French have historically done better with heart disease. Among those reasons is that the French typically eat smaller portions—

therefore the calories are less, overall—all the while eating more slowly, savoring their food more. Another is that they eat higher quantities of wholesome, fresh fruits and vegetables. The French tend to prize quality over quantity whereas Americans tend to lean the opposite way. The French also have more discipline in their meals, not snacking as much as Americans. Another big factor is that the French drink substantially less sodas and more water. And we cannot forget that the French are more apt to live more active lifestyles, walking more, working more in the open air, and valuing higher the role of

time spent with the family. However, as the world becomes more Americanized (including France), the same proportions of lifestyle diseases are prevailing. Last but not least, this “paradox” fails to take into account that certain groups in America tend to have far less coronary heart disease than the average Frenchman who generally do not drink red wine at all (groups like Seventh-day Adventists, for example). One thing is clear, there are far more factors in thwarting heart disease than simply drinking red wine.



### ~ The Good ~

Red wine does have healthful properties, however—but they are not in the alcohol, but in the grapes. Fresh grapes, or grape juice, have been shown to have more of those healthful properties of flavonoids and resveratrol than its alcoholic counterpart. The health community recognizes that flavonoids prevent the blood from clumping (great for heart health), are extremely potent antioxidants (great for cancer), and help with LDL cholesterol (the bad kind).<sup>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9</sup> But grapes are not the only food source of these powerful agents for health. A variety of fruits, vegetables, and grains also contain them, including strawberries, cherries, blueberries, grapefruit, onions, and kale.

### ~ The Bad ~

Simply because a substance has healthful properties does not mean that it does not have unhealthful properties or that we should jump right at it. Then we must weigh the negative against the positive. The harmful effects upon the body by ethanol, or alcohol no matter what source, are extensive. Light to moderate drinking can cause, on the intestinal tract cirrhosis of the liver, GERD, hepatitis, gastritis and ulcers, and pancreatitis.<sup>10</sup> Light or moderate drinking suppresses the immune system by two-thirds with only two drinks<sup>11 12</sup> which increases vulnerability to bacterial and viral infections and paves the way for

[increased mortality or illness due to cancers](#). The Honolulu Heart Study found that light drinkers have [more than double the risk of hemorrhagic strokes](#). Ties to even light drinkers include a [significant elevation in triglycerides](#) and since alcohol carries twice as many calories as sugar—gram per gram—it is a tremendous contributor to overweightness. Both hypoglycemia and nutritional deficiencies are not uncommon amongst alcohol users. [The ties between osteoporosis and alcohol use are very strong](#). And the list goes on, not to mention the obvious mental impairment and deleterious effects. With so many negative health consequences, why—besides just wanting to have a good time—do people still defend the use of moderate amounts of wine? The answer transcends science and enters the realm of faith.  
(*continued in Part II*)

## References

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