



Don't overindulge on wine, chocolate

With Valentine's Day approaching, can you tell me more about the health benefits of chocolate and red wine?

First, a word of caution: Don't let positive news about foods and beverages that you enjoy give you an excuse to go on a bender. While there is some promising research on dark chocolate and red wine, overindulging on them would undermine the possibility of reaping benefits.

With that said, you might want to take a look at a Chow Line column from last year, "Jury still out on chocolate's benefits," online at <http://go.osu.edu/choc>. The bottom line: Flavonoids in very dark chocolate may improve the function of blood vessels, but the sugar and saturated fat it contains could cause other problems for the cardiovascular system. So, enjoy dark chocolate, but do so in moderation.

The same can be said of red wine. Scientists have known for years that consuming alcohol in moderation appears to be associated with 25 to 40 percent less risk of heart attack, ischemic stroke (the type caused by a blood clot), peripheral vascular disease, sudden cardiac death and death from all cardiovascular causes.

"In moderation" means no more than two drinks per day for men, and one drink per day for women. And "a drink" equates to 12 to 14 grams of alcohol -- what you get from 1.5 ounces of hard liquor, 5 ounces of wine, or 12 ounces of beer.

Many people believe red wine

offers additional health benefits over other types of alcohol, but research says that's an iffy proposition.

Much attention has focused on a polyphenol in red wine called resveratrol, which comes from the skins of grapes. Since red wine is fermented with grape skins longer than white wine is, red wine contains more resveratrol. And some research indicates resveratrol could reduce the risk of atherosclerosis and possibly offer other benefits. But other studies find no additional benefits of red wine over other types of alcohol. And besides, you can also get resveratrol from eating grapes (with skins, of course) or drinking grape juice.

Experts agree that too much alcohol is never a good thing. In addition to the damage it can cause the heart and liver, and the increased risk of cancer associated with too much alcohol, there's that little problem of empty calories: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently announced the results of a study that showed U.S. adults consume an average of almost 100 calories per day from alcoholic beverages. That can add up to extra pounds very quickly.

Don't let all this put a damper on your Valentine's Day. You can still enjoy red wine and dark chocolate. As with almost everything in nutrition, though, just don't overindulge.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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