

Title:

Alcohol: Health Benefit or Health Risk?

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Summary:

We've all heard the news about the potential heart-health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

We've all heard the news about the potential heart-health benefits of moderate alcohol consumption.

But whenever I hear one of these reports, I wonder whether it actually ends up doing more harm than good.

Most of the research regarding alcohol's effects in raising good cholesterol, or HDL, levels is based on observational studies.

Up to 4 percent of breast cancers can be attributed to alcohol. According to a recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association, drinking alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer by 10 percent for every 10 grams of alcohol consumed per day.

It's tempting to dismiss these health risks by pointing to more obvious ones, like excess weight gain and liver disease.

Add that much-ballyhooed glass of red wine a day without making any other changes in your diet, and you're in for a lot of trouble.

Counting calories from alcohol can be doubly difficult. Not only are these calories less satisfying than those from food, but they also tend to be consumed in larger quantities.

Bottom line: Be honest with yourself. Don't use health claims about spirits as an excuse to justify your drinking.

Most of all, remember that less is more. And get all the facts before you go looking for your next drink.

Jennifer Grossman is the director of the Dole Nutrition Institute. - NU

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