



PENDARVES

Premium Wines from the Wine Doctor

White Wine & Improved Lung Function

On 21/5/02 newspapers around the world told of new research which showed that white wine improved lung function better than any other form of alcohol. This piece of research became so newsworthy because it had evidence that white wine was better than red wine. For the past decade or so we have been told that red wine was the best, but as I have always said in reality it doesn't matter whether it is red or white wine, they both give good health benefits if consumed in moderation.

Dr. Holger Schunemann's team at the Department of Medicine, Division of Pulmonary (Lung), Critical Care and Sleep Medicine, State University of New York, Buffalo, New York, USA presented their findings at the American Thoracic Society meeting in Atlanta, Georgia.

Originally the research was submitted to BioMed Central on 14/11/2001 and published on 8/5/2002, as "Beverage specific alcohol intake in a population based study: Evidence for a positive association between pulmonary function and wine intake" (Reference www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2466/2/3).

Poor or reduced lung function is known to be a strong predictor of cardiovascular and all cause mortality (death) in the general population. This association is independent of whether one smokes or not, but obviously smoking would only make it worse. One of the factors which contributes to poor lung function may be exposure to oxidants. So any antioxidant effect, would show a positive relationship with lung function and this has been shown in other studies.

Alcohol acts as an antioxidant and thus may be linked to impaired lung function. But the antioxidants in wine can block this action hence have a beneficial effect on lung function, which was shown in this study where the effect was stronger for white wine drinkers than for red wine drinkers.

In the study 4,946 people aged between 35-79, who had been randomly selected from New York State Department of Motor Vehicles and Health Care Finance Association lists, were contacted. Of these 1,322 females and 1,215 males participated but this number was again reduced due to certain exclusion criteria such as previous emphysema, asthma and pulmonary fibrosis or incomplete histories (diet, alcohol consumption, lost results etc.)

Eventually 814 females and 741 males who had normal lungs and complete histories were studied for this paper - the first time that a study has investigated lifetime alcohol intake and white and red wine intake separately, in relation to pulmonary function,

Participants were interviewed about their lifestyle habits (including alcohol intake, socioeconomic group, diet, activity and smoking), measured (height, weight etc.) and tested for lung function. The two lung function tests carried out were the forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV or the amount of air in litres that you can blow out as hard as possible in one second) and the forced vital capacity (FVC or the predicted lung capacity in litres).

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The results of these lung function tests were compared statistically with the participant's alcohol consumption habits and showed a positive association of recent and lifetime wine intake with lung function. But contrary to expectations (based on the fact that red wine contains more antioxidants) the researchers found that "white wine was the only wine type significantly associated with (better) lung function". Beer and spirits intake showed little or no association with lung function. Thus this raises the question of whether this result is independent of the role of antioxidants and due to something else, or whether the total quantity of antioxidants is not the vital factor, but the quality of the antioxidants. The antioxidants in white wine have been shown to be smaller, hence able to perfuse (more) better into tissues than the larger and more abundant red wine antioxidants. Hence, the white wine antioxidants could get into the lung tissue more effectively than red wine antioxidants, to help preserve and defend the lungs from oxidative (free radical) attack thus leading to better lung function. As usual with wine it is a question of quality, not quantity.

The researchers said that their findings appeared to be independent of potential confounding factors such as smoking, weight, socioeconomic status and dietary antioxidant intake. Hence this study shows that red is not necessarily king. It doesn't matter which type of wine you drink (red or white), they both do you good in moderation. What does matter is that you drink the right type of wine with your food. So the correct criteria for choosing a wine is not whether it is red or white, but what type of food it will accompany.

Dr. Philip Norrie

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