



PENDARVES

Premium Wines from the Wine Doctor

Allergy, Side Effects & Hangovers

There are other harmful effects one can suffer from consuming wine, other than those suffered from straight abuse or excessive consumption. These harmful effects are those due to allergy and side effects in general, even with exposure to the smallest amounts of wine.

The Collins Dictionary defines allergy as a hypersensitivity to a substance that causes the body to react to any contact with that substance. As a doctor I define allergy as an immune system mediated response by the body to an allergen or allergy causing foreign matter. Allergies usually manifest themselves as migraine headaches, hayfever, itch, rashes, bowel colic, diarrhoea, asthma, swollen face and watery swollen eyes etc.

An allergic response is a response to protect the body from allergens - harmful foreign matter that we become exposed to mainly in the form of pollens, dust, hairs, fibres, foods and drinks etc. Sometimes the allergic response can be excessive and the resulting body's "cure" can be worse than the allergic complaint and be life threatening; such as when one develops an anaphylactic response resulting in laryngeal oedema or swelling up of the throat. If it is not treated straight away with adrenaline mainly, plus corticosteroids and antihistamines, one can choke to death.

Many consumers think that the main cause of allergy in wine is due to sulphur dioxide (SO₂). Sulphur dioxide is listed as 220 on the back label of the wine bottle and has been used as a preservative of foodstuffs since Roman times over 2,000 years ago. It always amuses me when people say they are allergic to wine because of the SO₂; but when I ask them if they eat dried fruit such as dried apricots they say that is alright - not knowing the dried fruit, for example, contains a lot of SO₂ as a preservative!

What these people are allergic to in wine, along with most consumers, is either the histamines or tannins in the wine, both of which come from the skin of the grape hence are usually found more in red wines than white wines. But allergy is idiosyncratic; in other words it is up to the individual what they are allergic to. Hence it is the old saying - one man's food is another man's poison, since one could be theoretically allergic to any one of the many thousands of components in wine. Even organic wines contain sulphur dioxide, histamines and tannins.

As a general rule, from an allergic point of view, older wines are better than younger wines as the histamines and tannins are less because they have been incorporated into the wine more with aging, bottled wine is better than cask wine, boutique wines are better than mass produced commercial wines and white wines are better than red wines.

A side effect is defined by the Collins Dictionary as any unwanted non-therapeutic effect caused by a drug or as an undesirable secondary effect. I define a side effect as any unwanted reaction to a substance, some of which can be harmful because not all side effects are harmful. A common example of a harmful side effect would be indigestion from arthritis drugs caused by gastritis or an inflamed stomach. This is not an allergy but an

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unwanted harmful secondary effect of the drug. An example of a harmless side effect would be one's urine turning yellow when one takes multivitamins. It is of curiosity value only as it is causing no harm.

There are two rare medical conditions caused by alcohol (a component of wine) which would strictly be termed side effects. The first condition is where people become extremely aggressive and emotional after a few drinks. The biochemical cause is not understood but it makes for a great possible legal defence if one committed an aggressive crime after one or two drinks.

The second condition is alcohol induced nymphomania; where consumption of a small amount of alcohol in a person with a pinealoma - a very rare benign tumour of the pineal gland in the brain - triggers off intense sexual arousal and subsequent sexual behaviour thus making alcohol the ultimate aphrodisiac in these people. The pineal gland secretes the hormone melatonin which controls skin pigmentation and our wake/sleep cycle.

A hangover is where one develops headache, nausea, vomiting, lethargy, a dry mouth etc. etc. due to excessive alcohol consumption. It is due to dehydration especially of the brain where it shrinks. The reason one becomes dehydrated is because of the osmotic pressure and diuretic effects of alcohol. The way to prevent a hangover is either to drink less alcohol or drink plenty of water or soft drinks whilst consuming alcohol. I always start a meal or a party with a soft drink then I have one after each alcoholic drink. A hangover is a side effect of excessive alcohol consumption.

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