

Red Wine Basics



The color of red wine may be derived from a vast assortment of grape varieties ranging from grapes that are reddish, deep purple, and even a beautiful blue on the color scale. These grapes give rise to wines with such color-descriptors as garnet, almost black, dark red, light red, ruby red, opaque purple, deep violet, maroon and the list goes on.

Where a particular red wine falls on the color spectrum however depends upon how long the grape skins are in contact with the grape's juice during the fermentation process, allowing the dispersion of both color and tannins. The individual wine's particular red hue depends on the grape type used in the process and the length of time the skin's pigmentation is in contact with juice.

Red wines are often classified by "body-type." For example, one might say that a certain red wine is "light-bodied" – referring to the mouth-feel and tannin structure. A light-bodied wine will have fewer tannins present and less presence on the palate. These are wines that are often less demanding partners with flavor-filled foods.

An example of a light-bodied red wine would be one derived from the Gamay grape variety, such as France's famed young red wine: Beaujolais Nouveau. A medium-bodied red wine will contain more tannins than the above Beaujolais Nouveau, but will not have near the pucker power of a high-powered California Cabernet Sauvignon or an Italian Super Tuscan.

Typical examples of medium-bodied red wines include: Merlot, Shiraz or Chianti. Full-bodied red wines boast the highest tannin (and often alcohol) content. Prime examples of full-bodied reds are France's esteemed Bordeaux wines, California's Cabernets and Italy's Super Tuscans. In general, light-bodied wines tend to "feel" more like water in the mouth. In contrast, "full-bodied" wines feel heavier, more like milk, due in large part to the higher tannin and typically, alcohol content.

There continues to be debate about the positive health benefits of drinking red wine in moderation. Many studies investigated the benefits of red wine suggested that moderate amount of red wine (one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men) lowers the risk of heart attack for people in middle age by +/- 30 to 50 percent. It is also suggested that alcohol such as red wine may prevent additional heart attacks if you have already suffered from one. Other studies also indicated that red wine can raise HDL cholesterol (the Good cholesterol) and prevent LDL cholesterol (the Bad cholesterol) from forming. Red wine may help prevent blood clots and reduce the blood vessel damage caused by fat deposits. Indeed, studies showed that people from the Mediterranean region who regularly drank red wine have lower risks of heart disease.

Red wine is a particularly rich source of antioxidants flavonoid phenolics, so many studies to uncover a cause for red wine's effects have focused on its phenolic constituents, particularly resveratrol and the flavonoids. Resveratrol, found in grape skins and seeds, increases HDL cholesterol and prevent blood clotting. Flavonoids, on the other hand, exhibit antioxidant properties helping prevent blood clots and plaques formation in arteries.

So should you load up on red wine? The simple answer is No. Studies showed that alcohol drinking may increase triglycerides (not good) and result in weight gain due to its empty calories. Other studies also suggested that alcohol consumption is associated with cancer risk. The American Heart Association cautions people NOT to start drinking if they do not already drink alcohol. If you already drink alcohol, do so in moderation. AHA recommends one to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. (A drink is one 12 oz. beer, 4 oz. of wine, 1.5 oz. of 80-proof spirits, or 1 oz. of 100-proof spirits.)