

The Health Benefits of Beer

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What better time to talk about beer. It's the Blues and Brews Festival!

Conversations and then studies as to the health benefits of alcohol were stimulated with the "French paradox". The paradox was finding that the French although imbibing in high-fat diets and smoking were found to have less heart disease than Americans. Their simultaneous consumption of red wine was considered the possible answer. This revelation fueled the exploration into the benefits of alcohol consumption.

One of the most noted authorities is Dr. Norman Kaplan, the hypertension specialist at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas. For over 20 years now he has gone on record as to the benefits of *moderate* alcohol consumption. "There is a large body of evidence that small quantities of alcohol provide protection against coronary attack, stroke and heart failure." He then adds, "Beer drinking has equal if not perhaps more health benefits than other types of drinking"

What Dr. Kaplan found was that it wasn't just red wine, filled with its flavonoids and anti-oxidants for which this was true. That beer contains a similar amount of 'polyphenols' (anti-oxidants) as red wine. Beer also contains B6 and folate. These particular vitamins are important in preventing the build-up of homocysteine in the blood which has been linked to heart disease. The homocysteine benefit was only seen in beer drinkers, not in the consumers of other alcohols or wine.

Dr. Kaplan points to new evidence that suggests that beer because of mechanisms "not clearly understood" may help increase bone density, thus reducing risk of fractures. Also, beer has been shown to raise the good cholesterols (HDLs) by 10-29%.

Thomas Jefferson seemed to know it all along, writing "Beer, if drank in moderation, softens the temper, cheers the spirit and promotes health".

All this being said, there are caveats. It is not a prescription to start drinking.

Moderate drinking is defined as 1 drink for women and up to two per day for men. "One drink" is one 12 oz beer, a 5 oz glass of wine or 1.5oz of distilled spirits.

Drinking over 1-2 drinks per day plays havoc on the body and undoes any benefit. Obesity (aka "beer belly"), liver disease and alcoholism are the well-known downers of inappropriate alcohol consumption. One beer or drink may relax you, reduce your stress and lead you into a peaceful slumber. More than

that can send blood sugar and toxin ripples through your liver. This usually occurs between 1-3 a.m., disrupting your sleep.

Here are some tips for you to healthfully enjoy the Blues and Brews Festival. Be sure to drink plenty of water in between your brewskies! Any alcohol is a diuretic. It pulls precious water out of the body. Water is much needed by the body especially in the high, dry altitude of Telluride and the dehydration caused by alcohol can aggravate altitude sickness.

Keep your blood sugar balanced. Doing so will go a long way to balance the effects of the carbohydrate load that beer brings. Choose well balanced meals and snacks this weekend. Add proteins, fats and good quality carbohydrates to the mix. Do not allow the beer to become your meal.

Finally...enjoy! Often we rely on alcohol to be our mood shifter. Focus on uplifting of your spirit through the beauty of Telluride as well as through the music. Enjoy responsibly consumed healthy brews this weekend!