Drinking and Heart Health

Alcohol can influence your health in numerous ways. The negative impacts of alcohol are well researched. Excessive alcohol or binge drinking use increases your risk of weight gain, elevated triglycerides, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, liver disease, digestive issues, cancers including those of the breast, mouth and throat, and alcohol dependence and addiction. Binge drinking is defined as 4 or more drinks for women, and 5 or more drinks for men.

There is great debate about the potential health benefits of alcohol, especially those that influence your heart. Nevertheless, the common theme of the connection between consuming alcohol and improving your health is moderation. You should not begin drinking or drink more often because of the supposed health benefits.

The American Heart Association defines moderate drinking as 1 to 2 drinks for men and 1 drink for women per day.¹ One drink is equal to:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 4 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of liquor

Alcohol use can result in behaviors associated with heart disease included overeating, making unhealthy food choices, and smoking.

Smoking and Heart Health

Smoking is one the worst things you can do for your health. The majority of preventable deaths occur as a result of smoking.² The chemicals in cigarettes are toxic to every part of your body. Contrary to popular belief, cigar smoking poses the same health risks as cigarette smoking.³ Light smokers or social smokers are also at risk.

Take action! If you currently smoke, take charge of your health and get help to quit.

Even if you don’t smoke, exposure to secondhand smoke can be just as detrimental to your health. Exposing others to secondhand smoke, especially children and teens, can increase their risk too.

The chemicals in cigarettes can damage the structure of the heart and blood vessels. The damage caused from smoking increases the risk for buildup of plaque in the arteries. This buildup hardens the arteries, resulting in inadequate blood flow to your heart, which can weaken the tissue. This subsequently increases the risk of heart disease.

At the same time, smoking exacerbates cholesterol and blood pressure problems, two of the other risk factors of heart disease. Smokers are at greater risk for low HDL (good) cholesterol and high blood pressure.

Smokers who also have one or more of the other risk factors of heart disease even further increase their risk of developing it.

Next Steps

1. Read Lesson 2: “The Effects of Smoking and Drinking on Cardiovascular Disease and Risk Factors”
2. Read Lesson 3: “Reducing Stress”
3. Take the Chapter 5 Quiz

Sources

1. heart.org American Heart Association. Alcohol and Heart Health. 2015. 07