

# Like clockwork

from Dr. Laura Corio, M.D.

Women's Health Issues

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## WHAT TO THINK ABOUT TAKING A DRINK

One day you read alcohol is good for your heart. The next day you read it's bad for your breasts. The issues are so confusing it's enough to drive you to drink! So is it OK to have that nightly cocktail? I've sorted through research on alcohol and women's health issues to bring you the most up to date conclusions.

### Heart Health

There appears to be a consensus that having a nightly glass of wine or an occasional beer can be cardioprotective by lowering your levels of LDL cholesterol (the so-called "bad" cholesterol) while boosting levels of HDLs (the so-called "good" cholesterol.) The antioxidants found in alcohol may also help to dilate blood vessels and stop red blood cells from clumping together thus diminishing the risk of having a heart attack or a stroke. Other alcohol antioxidants prevent cholesterol absorption and tumor growth while elevating the amount of heart healthy omega fatty-3 acids in the blood stream. However, drinking too much is toxic to your heart. It causes tissue damage and leads to conditions such as high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, and stroke.

### Cancer

The news regarding cancer and alcohol is not good. A new report from Cancer Research UK which looked at the drinking habits of more than a million women found that even light drinking on a regular basis considerably ups the risk of developing many forms of cancer. By the researchers estimate nearly 15% of breast, liver, rectum, mouth and throat are caused by drinking as little of one drink per day. And, they stressed, the raised cancer risk did not depend on what kind of alcohol was drunk - only the amount. For example, women who drank wine exclusively had a similar risk of developing cancer to those who drank other alcoholic beverages or a mixture of drinks. Scores of additional research investigations seem to support these findings.

### Pregnancy

Most health experts recommend that pregnant women, as well as women who are trying to conceive, abstain from alcohol entirely. Drinking endangers your growing baby in a number of ways: Studies show that just one drink a day can raise the odds for low birth weight and raise your child's risk for problems with learning, speech, attention span, language, and hyperactivity. Several investigations have found that expectant moms who have as little as one drink a week are more likely than nondrinkers to have children who later exhibit behavioral problems. It's also well established that alcohol consumption increases the chance of miscarriage and stillbirth. If you had a few drinks before you realized you were pregnant, don't stress out. However, my advice is to curtail drinking altogether as soon as you know you are with child or if you are thinking about conceiving in the next few months.

### The Bottom Line

As we await more research to confirm both the upsides and downsides of alcohol, you have to weigh the evidence already in against your personal health and future risk factors. I always tell my patients, if you're not already drinking don't start based on the benefits you read about. There are other ways to reduce your health risks that make more sense like eating right, getting regular exercise and maintaining a healthy weight. That said, it's OK to drink in moderation so long as you don't have a history of alcoholism or any other condition where drinking alcohol could have a negative impact on your health. A four-ounce glass of wine is equivalent to one serving and is the limit recommended by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. If you're unsure about what to do, let's talk about it.



### Moderate Drinking

A four-ounce glass of wine is equivalent to one serving and is the limit recommended by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



### Dr. Corio's Resources

For more information about alcohol and your health:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

[www.hhs.gov](http://www.hhs.gov)

- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism

[www.nih.org](http://www.nih.org)

## PEARLS

**The Question:** What effect will alcohol have on my weight?

**The Research:** While they're certainly not recommending wine drinking as a weight loss strategy, researchers at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota say those who down one or two adult beverages a day are 54 percent less likely than tee-totalers to be obese. In a study of 8,200 people, light-to-moderate drinking was not linked with being overweight. Researchers aren't sure why the drinkers weighed less than the non-drinkers but one theory is that most people who have a glass of wine or beer each day do so with the evening meal. Perhaps they eat fewer servings or perhaps a drink replaces a high-calorie evening snack.

**Dr. Corio Says:** Once again the concept of moderation is important to keep in mind. Is that occasional drink the reason your pants are tight? It's doubtful. But excessive drinking might be. That same study found that those who knocked back four or more drinks per day were 46 percent more likely to be obese than non-drinkers. And despite what any research study finds, you absolutely should not take up drinking as a weight loss strategy!

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**The Question:** Does having a few drinks hurt my bone health?

**The Research:** By age 35 most women have reached "peak bone mass" which means their bones are the strongest they'll ever be. Evidence suggests that drinking moderately does not increase the risk of osteoporosis in later years and there are even some studies that associate moderate drinking with increased bone density in menopausal and postmenopausal women. However, there is no doubt that having more than one or two drinks a day disrupts new bone cell growth which wreaks havoc on both vitamin D and calcium metabolism thereby further weakening bones.

**Dr. Corio Says:** This is a cautionary tale for young women who are still in the midst of laying down bone for the future: That night on the town may contribute to brittle bones thirty years from now. Older women should be aware that any more than a drink or two a day can speed up loss of bone density and may quite possibly increase the risk of fall-related fractures.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, British Medical Journal, Uptodate.com and Science Daily

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## Doctor & Office Hours

### Doctor's Hours

Monday	12:00 PM-6:00 PM
Tuesday	9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Wednesday	9:30 AM-2:30 PM
Thursday	8:00 AM-2:00 PM

### Office Hours

Monday	10:00 AM-5:00 PM
Tuesday – Friday	9:00 AM-4:00 PM

### Make an Appointment

Call 646-422-0730 during our normal office hours.



## News Flash

*When it comes to heart healthy benefits, red wine seems to have the strongest cardio-protective effect. According to recent tests performed at the University of California, Davis, the dryer the wine, the more flavinoids it contains. Cabernet Sauvignon typically has the highest concentration of flavinoids compared to sweeter wines like Merlots and red zinfandels. Interestingly, some of the same wines that show the lowest levels of flavinoids, contain high levels of another class of cardio-beneficial antioxidants called saponins. The average red wine contains three to 10 times as much saponin as white wine and in general, higher alcohol content translates to higher saponin concentrations. (Foods like soybeans and peas contain saponins as well.) Still another antioxidant isolated in the skin of red grapes, a substance called resveratrol, varies according to the conditions in which grapes are grown: Harsher climates and poorer soil quality seem to pump up resveratrol concentrations.*