

WINE AND DINE

A Valentine's toast to your heart

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By **BILL GARLOUGH For Sun Times Media**

Valentine's Day usually turns to thoughts of love, romance and celebrating the moment with a pleasing meal and possibly a glass of bubbly. Restaurants plan special menus that offer three to five courses with optional wine pairings. And chocolate desserts are a given.

My romantic thoughts this Valentine's Day turn to celebrating (hopefully) the good health of that special someone in your life. And lifting a glass of red wine may play a role in this process.

Health benefits

The question whether wine is good for you is a hot topic of discussion these days. It is challenging for the medical community to come out in favor of alcohol consumption, although they are intrigued by the benefits of a glass of red wine.

Numerous studies show that wine can have some positive health benefits by reducing the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Like most things, moderation is the key. It is recommended that men have no more than two drinks per day and women should limit their consumption to one drink per day.

Red wine is a rich source of antioxidants that may lower the risk of heart disease. Chemical compounds (Resveratrol) found in grape skins and seeds may lower the risks of cardiovascular disease by thinning blood, reducing the risk of blood clotting and artery plaque formation, and raising the good cholesterol (HDL) levels. As red wine stays in contact with the grape skins longer, red wine has been found to have higher levels of Resveratrol.

Is red wine a universal panacea for good health? Unfortunately no, as some medical conditions may worsen with the consumption of alcohol. It is always recommended to consult your physician with any questions.

Lifestyle with wine

An intriguing discussion in the culinary world is the French Paradox. While the French have a diet rich in saturated fats (i.e. butter, cheese, chocolate, goose liver pate), they have a lower incidence of heart disease and a longer life expectancy than Americans. As the French regularly consume more red wine, it was speculated that this was the deciding factor in this paradox.

This French Paradox was aired on "60 Minutes" in 1991, and suggested that red wine may decrease the incidence of heart disease.



Bill Garlough is an expert in wine and food pairings.

Wine of the Month
7 Deadly Zins: I could not resist suggesting this whimsical wine name for Valentine's Day. This 2007 old vine Zinfandel from California received a 90 pt. rating from Robert Parker. He describes this as "... a knock-out bargain. Aged completely in American oak, it is loaded with berry fruit, pepper, spice, and earth characteristics. This rich, full-bodied, opulent, luscious Zinfandel can be drunk now and over the next several years." Happy Valentine's Day and enjoy this luscious red wine. Suggested retail price: \$15.



Digging deeper into the subject of French and American health trends led me to a book titled "French Women Don't Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure" by Mireille Guiliano.

She explores the difference between the American and French viewpoints of food. She acknowledges that the French love their food. The differences boil down to portion sizes, only eating good quality/natural foods, eating slowly and savoring the moment.

Americans tend to be in a hurry, gulp down our meals, consume portions that are too large and eat foods that are overly processed. She mentions that if she overindulges one day, she reduces her food intake the next.

She also notes that French people walk more, to avoid traffic congestion.

Conclusions

What was learned:

- Food and wine are a lifestyle management
- Moderation in both food and wine consumption is key
- Watch food portions and caloric intake
- Exercise more; walk when possible
- Eat good quality, pure, unprocessed foods
- Eat slowly with smaller bites of food
- Savor the meal -- focus on your food and beverage
- A glass of red wine can offer health benefits
- A good wine pairing enhances the meal (that I already know!)

Bill's Wine Picks (with suggested retails)

Chandon Rose NV Sparkling Wine (California) - Wine Spectator 87 pts: \$17

Juan Gil Jumilla Red Wine (Spain) - Robert Parker 90+ pts. 2004-2006: \$15

Tait The Ball Buster Proprietary Red (Australia) Robert Parker 91 pts. 2008: \$18

Hahn Cabernet Sauvignon (California) 2007 vintage not rated: \$11

Bill Garlough is an owner of My Chef Catering in Naperville, the winner of the U.S. Chamber's Overall 2007 Small Business of the Year. Bill is a Level 1 Master Sommelier and pairs food and wine for My Chef's customers. He can be reached at info@mychef.com.