

a look at the world of brandy from

the BRANDY LOUNGE

BRANDY: TO YOUR GOOD HEALTH

Many medical specialists recommend a glass or two of red wine for its cardio-protective benefits and general wellbeing but now there's a study showing brandy may also offer advantages of good health.

Two academics from the School of Chemistry at Monash University, Melbourne, Australia, have gone on record as saying brandy, if enjoyed in moderation, can be good for you. According to the findings of Doctors Gordon Troup and Steve Langford, brandy is rich in antioxidants, known to protect against many diseases and premature ageing. Based on their research, in which they applied electron spin resonance spectroscopy, which uses microwaves to image free radicals and antioxidant chemicals, they contend that a standard 30 ml shot can provide the same antioxidant potential as the daily recommended intake of vitamin C.

Antioxidants present in grapes do not disappear during pot distillation as was originally thought. Most antioxidants found in brandy are derived from the copper from which the pot stills are made, as well as from the phenols found in the oak vats used to age brandy.

South African brandies must, by law, contain a minimum of 30% potstill content, although specialist, luxury potstill brandies will have a potstill content of 90% to 100%.

According to Troup, while the antioxidants only make up a small percentage of brandy, "they are a very important part of the mix". He did stress that as different antioxidants eliminate different free radicals, it is best to make brandy a part of a wider drinking repertoire that includes red wine or white wine aged in oak or exposed to grape skins and seeds.

The Australian findings follow research from France, a few years ago, which indicated that moderate consumption of Armagnac could help stave off illnesses such as heart attacks and thrombosis. Professor Nicholas Moore, of the University of Bordeaux, has been reported as saying a daily moderate consumption of the brandy had a positive effect on the body's defense system by being better able to fight free radicals.

Moderate consumption of alcohol, taken to be two to three daily servings for men, and one for women, has been associated in several medical studies with reduced risk of stroke, blood clotting, hypertension and cardiovascular disease in general, as well as with heightened

cognitive abilities and improved blood circulation. It has also been positively linked to a reduction in ulcers and gastritis and improved digestion. Alcohol can apparently help protect against certain cancers, as well as Alzheimer's disease.

Some researchers believe that alcohol should ideally be consumed with food to ensure the greatest possible benefits. As we saw in the last issue of this column, brandy is an excellent partner to many types of food, from charcuterie to dishes with spicy flavours or those served with egg or cream-based sauces.

A 40-year-long study in Holland was spotlighted recently at the American Heart Association's 47th annual conference on Cardiovascular Disease Epidemiology and Prevention. A presentation that showed a correlation between moderate alcohol consumption and health, was made based on the findings of what is known as the Zutphen study, involving 1 373 men living in the Dutch town of Zutphen. The men, aged between 40 and 60 at the start of the study in 1960, were tracked until death or if they survived, till June 2000.

Amongst the men in the research sample, those who drank less than two servings a day of any form of alcohol, tended to live longer than teetotalers. Compared with non-drinkers, men who reported moderate drinking were 33% less likely to die of any cause and 28% less likely to die of heart problems during the study. Although wine consumption showed the greatest benefits, any light alcohol intake was found to boost HDL ('good') cholesterol and help prevent blood clots.

The researchers made it clear, however, that none of the study population was asked to change their drinking habits or to document other lifestyle habits, including diet, exercise, and smoking, which could have impacted on their health. Consequently, they have not claimed alcohol as the sole reason for the men's longevity.

Nevertheless, next time you savour a brandy, its pleasure will be enhanced, knowing that if enjoyed responsibly, you could be doing your health a favour.