

Resveratrol – miracle compound from red wine?

The so-called French paradox refers to the fact that people in France have relatively low frequency of heart disease despite the fact that they stuff themselves full of butter and smoke like yesterday's chimney. Believe it or not, the phenomenon was first noted by Irish physician Samuel Black in 1819. For instance, the average French person consumed 108 grams per day of fat from animal sources in 2002 while the average American consumed about 72 grams. The French eat four times as much butter, 60 percent more cheese and nearly three times as much pork. They definitely love their fat! Who can blame 'em. Fat tastes darn good. And with the recent discovery of the 'new' fat 'taste' receptor published in the Journal of Clinical Investigation, it makes sense why we love the feel of fat in our mouths.

So what explains this bizarre paradox of eating lots of saturated fat, yet having lower levels of heart disease and perhaps better health overall? It's called wine my friends. And more specifically, the active ingredient in red wine is something called resveratrol.

This amazing ingredient found in grapes and red wine is well known for its positive effects on longevity in yeasts, worms and flies. Hey, you gotta start somewhere and scientists always like studying these 'simple' organisms first before moving on to the more complicated hominid variety (i.e. us). Also, resveratrol has been shown to have anti-cancer and anti-inflammatory effects.(1, 2)

More importantly, this ingredient could have profound effects on the health of women. Resveratrol and trans-resveratrol (i.e. the 'trans' version is a slightly different molecular configuration of the resveratrol molecule) are powerful phytoestrogens, present in the skins of grapes and other plant foods and wine. As you may know, phytoestrogens are naturally occurring plant-derived non-steroidal compounds that are functionally and structurally similar to steroidal estrogens, such as estradiol, produced by women. Conventional hormone-replacement drugs may cause serious adverse effects including stroke and gallbladder disease, and a host of other maladies such as endometrial, uterine and breast cancers. So where does resveratrol fit in?

But resveratrol isn't just for women. There are animal studies which show that sperm count and plasma testosterone is higher in animals that consume resveratrol!(3) So suffice it to say that drinking one glass of red wine a day is something I'd recommend for improved health and wellness.

BULLET POINT SUMMARY

What is it?

Resveratrol is a chemically referred to as a polyphenolic phytoalexin. It's found in the skin of red grapes and red wine.

What does it do?

Resveratrol has been show to have a number of beneficial health effects such as anti-cancer, anti-aging, anti-inflammatory as well as cardioprotective effects.

Commonly Consumed Dose for Efficacy

Reservartrol - A glass of red wine daily

References

1. Valenzano DR, Cellerino A. Resveratrol and the pharmacology of aging: a new vertebrate model to validate an old molecule. *Cell Cycle* 2006;5:1027-32.
2. Delmas D, Lancon A, Colin D, Jannin B, Latruffe N. Resveratrol as a chemopreventive agent: a promising molecule for fighting cancer. *Curr Drug Targets* 2006;7:423-42.

3. Juan ME, Gonzalez-Pons E, Munuera T, Ballester J, Rodriguez-Gil JE, Planas JM. trans-Resveratrol, a natural antioxidant from grapes, increases sperm output in healthy rats. *J Nutr* 2005;135:757-60.