

Celebrating menopause?

Should we drink to that?

Got that wine o'clock feeling again but find alcohol effects you differently as you approach your menopause? Menopause Matters editor, Pam Brook looks at what do you need to know or consider.

If you, like me, have always enjoyed a glass of crimson wonder or a refreshing cold G&T at the end of a particularly hard working or trying day then we are of course not unusual and I daresay normal! What is of course critical is how often and how much we drink and how that impacts on our menopause.

With many women working longer hours, at the pinnacle of their careers and/or juggling children, domestic chores, elderly parents it's no wonder that a drink is an attractive anaesthetic to numb the stress of a day or even to get some sleep.

In 2016 the NHS published some research indicating that women are now drinking almost as much as men, so there is reason to be cautious.

How does it affect menopause symptoms?

- Can be a trigger for hot flushes and night sweats
- Can trigger depression for those who are already vulnerable during menopause
- Excess drinking is bad for your health – menopausal or not.
- Too much, too often can leave you prone to:
- **Obesity around your middle – an apple shape is risk for cardiovascular disease**
- Increase in cancer risk, including breast cancer
- **Risk of developing type 2 diabetes**
- Osteoporosis and osteoporotic fracture
- **Key organ damage including heart, nerves, liver and possibly brain**

Why does this happen?

- As you age the amount of water in your body decreases so there is less to dilute concentrations of alcohol in your system and it stays there longer.
- **As women age we can often put on weight. Body fat cannot absorb alcohol so any excess weight you may be carrying can mean lower alcohol tolerance levels.**
- If you are taking medication, of any kind, and mix it with alcohol that can change the way your body deals with the drink you consume.

Can I drink?

Of course. If you do, enjoy it, but make sure it's moderate.

How much should I drink?

Maximum one drink per day ideally.

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level if you drink most weeks:

- women are advised not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis
- spread your drinking over three or more days if you regularly drink as much as 14 units a week
- if you want to cut down, try to have several drink-free days each week

Fourteen units is equivalent to six pints of average-strength beer or 10 small glasses of low-strength wine.

Benefits

For those who do enjoy a drink in moderation there are actually some benefits:

- **Lower risk of coronary heart disease than non-drinkers.**
- The heart benefits of moderate drinking become apparent at menopause when heart disease risk normally goes up, and the heart benefits continue after that. Hormone therapy doesn't affect that benefit.
- **Moderate consumption may slightly boost bone density**
- Lower risk of type 2 diabetes | dementia | stroke | obesity

What matters?

If you want to enjoy a drink during menopause it's the amount you drink that matters. As with anything a great deal depends on your own health status. If you are in any doubt talking to your GP is recommended.

Every woman is different – drinking can be a boost for some and a bane for others.

We can drink if we think. Cheers to that!

