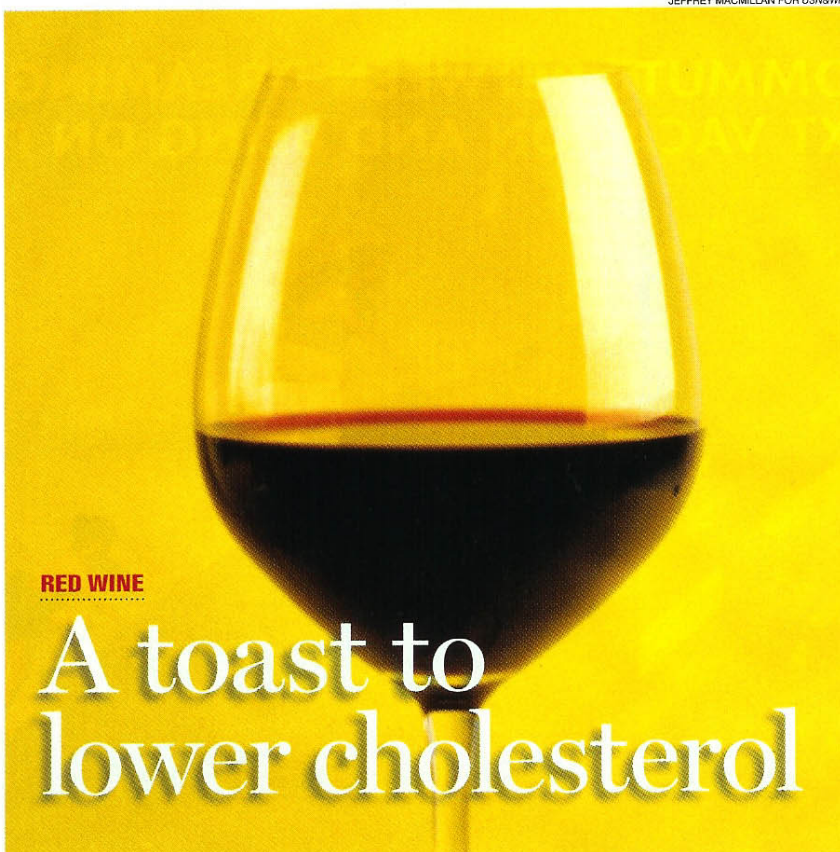


JEFFREY MACMILLAN FOR US&WR



RED WINE

# A toast to lower cholesterol

BY ALEX MARKELS

**H**ealth researchers have long wondered why the French, who have a predilection for creamy sauces, foie gras, and similarly high-fat foods, tend to live just as long as people with better eating habits. A spate of recent studies point to a possible reason: France's equally strong taste for red wines that contain resveratrol, a chem-

ical compound proven to extend the lives of yeast cultures and fruit flies, and which may have similarly beneficial effects on humans by lowering cholesterol levels. In one study just published in the journal *Nature*, scientists found that the chemical mimics the effect of a low-calorie diet, which has been found to extend the lives of lab rats by 30 percent to 50 percent. "It needs more study, but there's the potential that human life could be ex-

tended, too," says David Sinclair, a Harvard researcher who coauthored the study.

Resveratrol, which Sinclair thinks should be renamed "reversatrol" for its life-sustaining properties, is produced naturally by grapes to fight off fungal diseases that can take hold when it's damp outside. The amount in wine varies widely, depending on the type of grape, where it's grown, and how it's processed. For example, since resveratrol is found primarily on grape skins, it is almost nonexistent in most white wines, which are fermented only after the skins are removed. The same is true of some mass-produced red wines that are filtered to remove the tannins, which can make recently bottled wines taste bitter. But filtering also eliminates the resveratrol.

**N.Y. high.** In a study of hundreds of wines from around the globe, Cornell researcher Leroy Creasy found the highest resveratrol levels in pinot noir grapes grown in cooler, rainy places like the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York and Oregon's Willamette Valley. (In fact, the highest resveratrol content found in a wine was in Vinifera's Fleur de Pinot Noir, with four times as much as the nearest California pinot noir tested; chart). Long sown in France's cool Burgundy region, pinot noir is considered a finicky grape to grow, in part because it is susceptible to rot, which may be the reason it produces more resveratrol than other grapes—up to 40 times as much resveratrol as grapes such as merlot and cabernet sauvignon.

Most wines aren't measured frequently for their resveratrol content, which can change from year to year depending on growing conditions. So Creasy suggests choosing a variety of pinot noir wines all grown in a humid climate and made by traditional European methods, which eschew filtering.

Just how much you need to drink to benefit from resveratrol's potentially life-sustaining effects remains unknown, but researchers like Sinclair suggest starting with a glass a day. You'll need a big budget. Studies also indicate that resveratrol breaks down within a day after you've uncorked the bottle.

A bevy of resveratrol pills hawked on the Internet suffer from similar degradation, rendering them all but useless, according to several researchers. But you can ensure a boost by slapping together a sandwich of peanut butter and grape jelly, which both contain high levels of the chemical. Wash it down with a nice glass of pinot noir, and you'll practically be swimming in the fountain of youth. ●

## Smart Chart

THE WINE	THE CLIME	HOW DIVINE?
<b>Fleur de Pinot Noir</b> Vinifera Wine Cellars, \$13 at <a href="http://drfrankwines.com">drfrankwines.com</a>	From a vineyard in the damp Finger Lakes, where resveratrol runs high.	"Aromas of plums and cherries," says the winemaker.
<b>2000 Benton Lake Oregon Pinot Noir</b> \$15 at <a href="http://klwines.com">klwines.com</a>	From the cool, rainy Northwest.	"A lighter, more elegantly styled pinot noir," says wine buyer Gary Westby.
<b>2001 Acacia Carneros Pinot Noir</b> Acacia Winery, \$26.50 at <a href="http://wine.com">wine.com</a>	From the cool, often foggy Carneros region, north of San Francisco.	A "smart buy," says <i>Wine Spectator</i> , citing ripe, vibrant fruit flavors.
<b>2002 Ninth Island Pinot Noir</b> Pipers Brook Winery, \$10 at <a href="http://boulderwine.com">boulderwine.com</a>	Tasmania's cool weather and traditional winemaking help preserve resveratrol.	Well priced and well flavored, with hints of berries, cherries, and spices.