

# To Your Health



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 **MYERS Medical Pharmacy**

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## Drink Wine to Beat Dementia Risk, But Find the Balance

For more than thirty years, research has been done and much debate has carried on about the benefits or risks of drinking alcohol, and wine in particular. After an analysis of research since 1977, it has been determined that drinking moderate amounts of alcohol, especially wine, may lower the risk of dementia, which often leads to severe Alzheimer's disease.

As a matter of fact, the association between moderate drinking and reduced risk of dementia and cognitive impairment was found to be significant in 14 of 19 countries, including the United States.

It isn't clear why moderate drinking may reduce the risk of dementia and cognitive impairment, but one school of thought suggests that alcohol might improve blood flow in the brain and thus brain metabolism which keeps the brain sharp.

*Resveratrol*, found in wine at fairly high levels, is a naturally occurring antioxidant that decreases the stickiness of blood platelets and helps blood vessels remain open and flexible. It is also known that it inhibits the enzymes that can stimulate cancer cell growth and suppress immune response. Wine is the primary dietary source of resveratrol, and red wine contains much greater amounts of resveratrol than white wine, since resveratrol is concentrated in grape skin and the manufacturing process of red wine includes prolonged contact with the skins.

The researchers don't recommend that nondrinkers start drinking. But moderate drinking, if it is truly moderate, can be beneficial. Moderate drinkers were found to be 23% less likely to develop dementia, Alzheimer's disease and other forms of cognitive impairment. But don't read this fact as a reprieve to drink heavily. More than three to five drinks per day was associated with a higher risk of dementia and cognitive impairment.

According to Dr. James Galvin, director of the Pearl Barlow Center for Memory Evaluation and Treatment at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York City, there are many things one can do to stave off the onset of dementia:

*"The Mediterranean diet with whole grains, fresh fruit and vegetables, olive oil and moderate red wine also reduces the risk of dementia, as does exercise, social engagement, mental activities and an optimistic outlook on life. It is clear that heart healthy behaviors are also brain healthy behaviors."*

## Echinacea. Does It Really Treat, and Maybe Cure the Common Cold?

Here's what a study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found:

**The Common Cold Is Common** The cold is the most common infection in humans. And colds are expensive. Treating colds costs \$40 billion annually, which places colds among the top-10 most expensive illnesses.

**Prevention Is Key** Preventive measures include hand washing, sneezing in your sleeve, covering your cough, and staying home when you are sick,

Once you get a cold, is Echinacea of any use? Researchers in Wisconsin sought the answer in a study funded by the National Institutes of Health. It included more than 700 people ranging in age from 12 to 80, who all had colds. The results indicated a very small non-significant benefit from Echinacea -- a 10% decrease in cold severity and about a half a day less of symptoms.

Next time you have a cold, you decide. At the end of the day, when all prevention measures fail and the doctor is sick, they go back to good old chicken soup, fluids, rest, and herbal tea,... maybe some that has a little Echinacea.

### Take Advantage of New Healthcare Reform Provisions

Recent provisions in Medicare and insurance oversight aim to improve the quality of healthcare, lower the cost of care, provide access to affordable care, and protect consumers.

Here, we highlight several current provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and outline what you should know to benefit now.

#### Improving Quality of Care While Lowering Costs

The ACA provides assistance for patients with Medicare who have reached the coverage gap (the "donut hole") in medication coverage under Medicare Part D. Patients paying for drugs in this gap will now get a 50% discount on covered brand-name drugs and a 7% discount on generic drug purchases. Additional savings are expected as this gap is closed over the coming years.

Patients with Medicare can now also take advantage of a variety of preventive services without the need for copayments, coinsurance or deductibles.

Patients enrolled in job-related health plans or in individual health insurance policies created after March 23, 2010 also may avoid copayments/coinsurance or deductibles when receiving recommended preventive health screenings, vaccinations, and counseling.

#### Improving Access to Affordable Care

If your health insurance policy covers children, you can now add or keep your children on your policy until they turn 26.

The Pre-existing Condition Insurance Plan (PCIP) provides access to insurance for people with pre-existing conditions who have been denied coverage and meet other eligibility criteria. Recent updates to this benefit have reduced premiums by as much as 40%.

#### Providing Consumer Protections

The ACA has a number of provisions that protect consumers. Health plans that began on or after September 23, 2010 can no longer retroactively cancel coverage solely because a patient or employer makes an honest mistake on their insurance application.

Job-related health plans that cover children and individual health insurance policies issued after March 23, 2010 cannot limit or deny benefits or deny coverage for a child younger than age 19 simply because the child has a "pre-existing condition."

Lifetime limits on most benefits are prohibited in any health plan or policy issued or renewed on or after September 23, 2010, and the ACA also restricts and phases out the annual dollar limits many health plans can place on most covered benefits.

As you look for guidance on how the ACA will benefit you, it is important to have a clear understanding of the new law and its provisions.

### Help for Uninsured Patients Getting Medicines They Need

Many patients are unable to afford their medications. According to the US Census Bureau, 50.7 million people (16.7%) were without some form of health insurance in 2009. Even among those with insurance, a significant proportion have inadequate prescription coverage. Patients either have to seek sources of assistance to pay for medications or forego treatments altogether.

#### Patient Assistance Programs

There are a variety of patient assistance programs (PAPs) that serve to promote access to free or reduced cost medications. Manufacturers can be contacted directly to inquire about PAPs they offer for their products. But there is more comprehensive information available on medication and healthcare assistance from a number of organizations that can help patients access the larger realm of PAPs offered by state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and pharmaceutical manufacturers. The organizations discussed in more detail below are accessible via the Internet and some by telephone.

#### Partnership for Prescription Assistance

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA) was launched in 2005. It provides access to more than 475 public and private programs that provide over 2,500 free or nearly free medications. According to their data, PPA has helped over 6 million patients obtain free or reduced cost medication. An advantage of the PPA is that it can be accessed by telephone in addition to the internet.

The PPA Internet request process is fairly straightforward. Via the Website, a patient or caregiver can enter the name(s) of the medications needed along with some basic financial information. Depending on the particular needs of the patient, PPA then directs the requester to various assistance programs that would meet those specific needs. Their web site is <http://www.pparx.org>.

#### RxAssist Patient Assistance Program Center

RxAssist, sponsored by AstraZeneca, is a free, web-based directory of PAPs, Medicare Part D information, and low-cost medication programs. Its website is divided into 2 sections: 1 geared for healthcare professionals, and 1 designed for patients.

In either section, a drug name is searched, and results for applicable PAPs and discount programs are provided. The qualifying income levels for a given program are detailed as well. For more information, see their web site at <http://www.rxassist.org/>.

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### Help for Uninsured Patients Getting Medicines They Need

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#### Savings Cards

Savings cards may be available to help some eligible patients afford medications by allowing them to buy certain prescription and generic medications at reduced prices. A list of savings cards is available on the Partnership for Prescription Assistance website at [http://www.pparx.org/en/prescription\\_assistance\\_programs/discount\\_cards](http://www.pparx.org/en/prescription_assistance_programs/discount_cards).

Here's an example:

#### Freedom Rx Card

The Freedom Rx Card (**available at Myers!**) offers substantial discounts on all brand-name and generic drugs. It can save members an average of 15% on brand drugs and 50% on generic drugs. This program can be used to obtain savings on prescription drugs that are excluded by your insurance plan or are not covered because you have exceeded your insurance plan's maximum limits. In some instances, you might find that the Freedom Rx Card's price is lower than your program's co-payment amount. In addition, if your plan does not offer you a drug card and you are reimbursed after each transaction, you may be able to use the Freedom Rx Card to lower your out-of-pocket expenses. For more information, see their web site at <http://www.freedomrxcard.com/> or call 1-800-966-0407.

**Note:** The above resources are either hosted by pharmaceutical companies or are nonprofit programs. A host of additional websites is available to direct you toward valuable free or reduced cost medication resources. However, as always, caution is warranted whenever you relay sensitive patient health and financial information via

### Flu Vaccination During Pregnancy Protects Mothers and Newborns

Influenza vaccination during pregnancy may protect newborns, according to the results of a population-based surveillance study published in a supplement to the June issue of the American Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology.

Given that infants less than 6 months of age have the highest hospitalization rate among all children, and that the vaccine is not licensed for that age group, the study supports that infants, born to vaccinated mothers, benefit from the transfer of maternally derived antibodies.

The study recommends that all pregnant women receive the influenza vaccine during pregnancy, because it is known that if they get the flu, pregnant women have increased morbidity and mortality during pregnancy and in the immediate postpartum period. Mothers pass antibodies through the placenta to the baby.

### Indoor Tanning Tax Sends Strong Health Message: Indoor Tanning Is Unsafe

Countless scientific studies continue to demonstrate clear and compelling evidence that tanning bed use increases the risk of developing all forms of skin cancer.

According to dermatologist Ronald L. Moy, MD, FAAD, president of the American Academy of Dermatology Association, "There is an indoor tanning tax, that sends a clear message to Americans -- especially young people -- that tanning is a dangerous activity and that a tan is not a sign of good health. As the medical doctors who treat more than 3.5 million cases of skin cancer in America every year, dermatologists are focused on increasing awareness of and protecting the public from the known skin cancer risks associated with UV radiation from indoor tanning."

However, there have been two bills introduced in the U.S. House and Senate recently, to repeal the tax on tanning bed services. The Academy feels that, "The proposed repeal legislation ignores the serious public health impact of indoor tanning and the dramatic rise of skin cancer in young women."

Indoor tanning is associated with a 75 percent increase in the risk of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. Melanoma incidence rates have been increasing for at least 30 years and melanoma is increasing faster in young women (15-29 years old) than in young men in the same age group. A major difference in behavior is that women are more likely to use indoor tanning beds.

It is the hope of the Academy that the current federal tax on this activity remains in place and continues to act as a deterrent to this harmful behavior.

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