

[IMAGE]

Alcohol Consumption May Help Prevent Gallbladder Disease

Gallstones, hard stones made up of deposits of cholesterol and other material, usually develop in the gall bladder and can be as small as a grain of sand or as large as 2.5 inches. Most of the time, gallstones produce few or no symptoms; however, when symptoms do occur, they include severe nausea, vomiting, shivers and abdominal pain.

In severe cases, gallbladder disease may develop, at times necessitating surgical removal of the gallbladder. However, a new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* shows that moderate consumption of alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine and spirits, might help lower the risk of symptomatic gallstones and gallstone disease in women.

Women's Health Study participants with no history of gallstones or gallbladder disease were monitored for 20 years for the development of the condition; food-frequency questionnaires (every two to four years) were used to track alcohol intake. Results showed that all alcoholic beverage types were inversely associated with the development of gallstone disease, independent of consumption patterns (e.g., frequency or amount of alcohol consumed).

But before you run out and stock your fridge, the study cautions patients to discuss the potential health effects of alcohol consumption with a qualified health care professional. After all, while alcohol may help prevent gallbladder disease, it can also contribute to liver problems and dependency issues, among other complications. Most experts agree that your best bet in preventing gallstones is to eat a well-balanced diet low in fat and rich in whole grains, lean meat and vegetables.

Reference:

Leitzmann MF, Tsai C-J, Stampfer MJ, et al. Alcohol consumption in relation to risk of cholecystectomy in women. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* August 2003: Volume 78, Number 2, pp.339-347.

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