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11°C

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More red wine, please ... it's good for you!

by JULIE WHELDON - [More by this author »](#) Last updated at 22:00pm on 31st January 2007

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Email newsletter



Drinking red wine could help slow down the ageing process, new research suggests.

Scientists have found melatonin, a substance found in grape skins as well a whole range of other foods, can protect cells from age-related damage.

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They therefore recommended that people wanting to fight the ravages of time boost their levels of melatonin through eating more foods such as onions, bananas, rice and cherries - plus drinking red wine.

Melatonin is a naturally-occurring hormone which plays a key role in the body clock and has become widely used by frequent travellers to try to counteract jet leg.

In Britain it is available only on prescription but in the USA melatonin supplements are widely sold over the counter in drugstores.

It is also found naturally in a whole host of foods ranging from onions to red wine.

As well as affecting body clock, new research has found it may also act as an anti-oxidant, mopping up harmful molecules that can damage cells.

Scientists from the Spanish Ageing Research Network took genetically modified mice who suffered accelerated ageing.

By studying them they found that the first signs of aging began at five months - equivalent to 30 years old in humans - and was due to a surge in oxygen and nitrogen which can cause inflammation and so cell damage.

They then gave the rodents melatonin and found that it helped counteract this age-related process.

The researchers led by Professor Dario Acuna Castroviejo, of the University of Granada, Spain, found giving melatonin to the animals every day from five months of age, when they stop producing it naturally, appeared to offset ageing.

This suggests that if humans took a daily supplement of melatonin from the age of 30 or 40 onwards then they too could delay the normal ageing process.

But there is uncertainty about how it may affect other parts of the body.

As it is a hormone it may affect a woman's reproductive system - a recent study found different levels caused by seasonal changes can affect IVF outcomes.

Despite this Professor Acuna Castroviejo suggested melatonin supplements should be legalised to help prevent age related illnesses.

But in the meantime, he said: "While the substance becomes legalised humans should try to increase melatonin consumption through food such as red wine, fruit and vegetables and cereals."

The results of his studies have been published in several journals including Frontiers in Bioscience and Free Radical Research.

Red wine has long been associated with all kinds of health benefits.

Previous studies have suggested that a glass of red wine a day may protect the heart and scientists concluded chemicals called flavonoids that come from the skin and seeds of the grape may be behind this.

Other research has also shown it can help reduce the risk of developing some cancers and may even help stave off gum disease.

Last summer a team from the University of Milan also said it may help people drop off to sleep thanks to the melatonin content.

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Here's what readers have had to say so far. Why not add your thoughts below?

What else are we waiting for now that we have all these tips?

- Stella Offor, Leuven, Belgium

Here in Gascony red wine is regularly consumed, perhaps twice a day and when one looks at the obituaries almost all are in their 80s or 90s or even more!

- Martyn Cleasby, Aubiet, France

As my GP said to me you can have your glass of wine a day; just not a bottle size glass! I must admit I enjoy a glass or two of red wine.

- Doreen Hutton, UK

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