

Alcohol increases allergy symptoms

A recent Swedish study involving 9 000+ individuals to test the effects of alcohol intake on the upper nasal airways found that people with hay fever were more prone to sneezing and getting a runny nose after a drink, while another Danish study found that two glasses of wine a day can double the risk for allergy symptoms.



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Mariska Fouché, spokesperson for leading allergy medicine provider, Pharma Dynamics, says cutting back on beer, wine and fruity summer cocktails this festive season could mean less sneezing, a clearer nose and more comfortable eyes for allergy sufferers.

"Another Danish study suggests that people who drink too much alcohol are much more likely to develop all year round nasal allergies than those who drink less. Alcohol seems to trigger hypersensitivity reactions - the very same type of overreactions that occur when one's immune system over-responds to allergens, so drinking alcohol could worsen allergic rhinitis symptoms."

Fouché also notes that true alcohol allergies - known as alcohol intolerance - are more common than we think.

"The sudden onset of alcohol allergy - even just after a few sips - is possible at any age and is important that it gets evaluated by a specialist. The most commonly reported symptoms could include a flushed or tickling sensation on the face, swelling of the lips, mouth or throat, while others can experience a runny nose, headaches, shortness of breath and hives.

"Wine contains proteins from grapes, bacteria and yeast, as well as sulphites and other organic compounds which can cause an allergic-like reaction. Egg whites and gelatine are also often used in the filtration processing of wine. Yeast and moulds used in brewing beer from barley can also cause chemical reactions that produce histamines (a compound involved in allergic response) and tyramines (amino acids associated with headaches and hypertension).

"The 'LTP' protein allergen is found in the skins of grapes, which makes red wine more likely than other types of alcohol to

elicit a reaction, as white wine is fermented without the grape skins. The ethanol used in your favourite drink may also cause blood vessels to expand, which makes absorption of irritating agents a lot more likely.

"A reaction to fresh fruit and vegetables that may be used as a garnish or a mixer in a cocktail could also set off an allergy. Watch out for hazelnuts and almonds in alcohol, which can also be a problem for those with a nut allergy."

Identify, eliminate

If you suspect that the cause of your allergy may be lurking in your wine glass, Fouché suggests drinking one type of alcohol for a night and see if any symptoms develop. If not, cross that beer or wine off your list and gradually try a different kind until you figure out which drink contains offending allergens.

"Whilst moderate alcohol use is always advisable, there is no reason to give up drinking alcohol if your symptoms are mild. If you do not react well to one type, try another, but if your symptoms include shortness of breath or you become seriously ill, contact your doctor immediately.

"Rather play it safe this festive season by consuming grain-free drinks such as potato vodka, rum and tequila moderately and stay away from flavoured or carbonated drinks such as coolers, which are more likely to trigger an allergic reaction. If sulphites in wine cause allergic reactions, stick to red wines and if LTP in red wine troubles you, then stick to white wines," concludes Fouché.

For more information, go to www.allergyexpert.co.za.

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