

# CHEERS!

Raise your glass to a stronger heart with these beneficial beverages.

BY MALLORY CREVELING



## **TOMATO JUICE**

Packed with the antioxidant lycopene and vitamins C, E and K, tomatoes decrease bad cholesterol and lower blood pressure—two crucial factors for enhancing heart health. Just be sure to buy a bottle of juice that contains 140 mg of sodium or less per serving, advises Bonnie Taub-Dix, RDN, author of *Read It Before You Eat It* and Family Circle Health Advisory Board member. Too much salt can cause your body to retain water and possibly raise blood pressure.

## **COFFEE**

Regularly consuming a cup of joe reduces the risk of having calcium in your coronary arteries, a sign of vessels hardening and narrowing, which can cause heart attacks. Coffee's antioxidants and its ability to improve insulin sensitivity possibly provide the payoff. No need to say “when,” according to research. Those who drink three to five cups a day get the biggest benefits. If your intake is modest, don't pour another, says Taub-Dix. You'll still get some advantages from one cup.

***“What you put in your glass can dictate what your heart looks like today and in the future.”***

—Bonnie Taub-Dix, RDN, founder of BetterThanDieting.com and author of *Read It Before You Eat It*

## **RISK RAISERS**

**While some drinks strengthen the body’s most important muscle, these three weaken it.**

### **SODA**

High-fructose corn syrup—often a sweetener in soft drinks—ups risk factors for heart disease, including increased levels of LDL cholesterol, triglycerides and uric acid. Drinking just one can of soda a day for two weeks is enough to bring on negative effects.

### **ENERGY DRINKS**

Due to these fizzy liquids’ high content of caffeine and other stimulants, consuming just one bottle has been shown to raise resting blood pressure, which increases the odds of experiencing cardiovascular problems. The spike is highest for those who don’t usually gulp energizing liquids.

### **SUGARY JUICES**

Drinks containing “fruit” aren’t always good for you, particularly those with added sugar. Your body rapidly absorbs the sweet stuff, causing blood glucose to rise quickly. Regular consumption can lead to insulin resistance, inflammation and weight gain—all of which can hurt your heart.



### **GREEN SMOOTHIES**

A diet packed with produce helps your heart by controlling cholesterol and improving blood flow. Smoothies are a convenient, on-the-go way to consume more fruits and vegetables, especially greens. Taub-Dix’s favorite combo includes a handful of spinach or kale, a half-cup of skim milk or Greek yogurt and one banana.

### **BEER**

Red wine isn’t the only alcoholic beverage that has cardio cred—beer does too. Downing a cold one improves blood flow and artery function, research has found. (The study was done on men, but the findings likely apply to women as well.) A light choice will also save you some calories. But keep in mind that there’s a tipping point: If you drink more than seven servings of booze a week, the results go from heart helping to harming.

### **MATCHA GREEN TEA**

Ground from leaves, this powdery green tea is a potent potable.

It boasts more than double the amount of catechins (which are powerful antioxidants) contained in standard green tea. Several studies have shown that these catechins lower the odds of developing cardiovascular disease. Start with about half a teaspoon in 2 ounces of hot water, whisk until frothy and then add more water to taste. To cut down on some of the grassy flavor, Taub-Dix suggests pouring matcha into a pitcher containing ice and potassium-rich fruits like apples or pears, which also help to regulate heart rhythm.

### **POMEGRANATE JUICE**

Research has shown that drinking this beverage may help control hypertension by making blood flow more freely to your ticker. It also fights the harmful effects of free radicals and can lower bad cholesterol. “Pomegranates are believed to be protective because of their blend of antioxidants and polyphenols,” says Taub-Dix. Just look for brands with no added sugar, she suggests. Try a splash in your sparkling water with a squeeze of lime.