Let’s Toast to This: Alcohol May Soothe Arthritis Pain

July 29, 2010

Occasional after-dinner drinks may help reduce the severity of rheumatoid arthritis and lower the risk of developing the disease, according to a study published in the journal *Rheumatology* and reported by Agence France-Presse (AFP).

Researchers at England’s University of Sheffield studied the month-long alcohol consumption of 873 arthritis patients and more than 1,000 people in a control group. Participants also completed questionnaires, diagnostic testing (X-rays and blood) and joint examinations.

Scientists found that patients who drank alcohol more than 10 days a month had less severe symptoms and showed less joint damage and inflammation than those who drank less or never imbibed.

Researchers also discovered that non-drinkers and infrequent drinkers were four times more likely to develop rheumatoid arthritis.

But before you reach for another glass of wine, scientists suggest you weigh the benefits of alcohol consumption against the health consequences of excessive drinking.

Why hold back? Well, researchers said they weren’t sure why alcohol helps.

“There is some evidence that alcohol suppresses the activity of the immune system and that this may influence the pathways by which rheumatoid arthritis develops,” said James Maxwell, lead study author.

Maxwell added that it’s possible alcohol may stop pain once rheumatoid arthritis develops.

While the study determined alcohol’s positive effect on arthritis sufferers, it didn’t measure how much booze patients drank.

In addition, researchers measured only how often participants imbibed and the data relied solely on patients’ recollections about drinking.

More than 1 percent of mostly elderly people in the United States and Europe suffer from

rheumatoid arthritis.

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