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Wine and Leg Cramps

Question: “Why do some Shiraz wines give me leg cramps at night, but not other varietals? I must say I prefer a Shiraz”

Matthew’s Response: I’m assuming you’re incorrectly using the term “varietals” and simply meaning to refer to other Shiraz wine. Regardless, this is a really interesting question. Now I’m not a medical doctor, but I have a sneaking suspicion that your leg cramps could be an allergy/sensitivity to sulfites. Sulfites are in wine.

What’s interesting is that you say some Shiraz give you leg cramps and not others. It could be that some Shiraz wines have higher levels of sulfites than other Shiraz wines.

Sulfites are chemicals that are naturally occur with fermentation. However, in many cases, small amounts of sulfites are added to prevent contamination. You’ll see at least in the US that all bottles have to contain a warning that they contain sulfites, also Australia and other some other countries.

Now what’s interesting is that some people claim many European made wines do not add many (or any sulfites). I have never been able to substantiate this claim for sure though.

Another possibility is that perhaps the Shiraz wine - that does not cause the leg cramps - is organic. Perhaps, with the amount of sulfites varying enough between wines that are organic and non-organic, just enough variance occurs to cause an allergic reaction which manifest in the form of leg cramps.

I have certainly heard of people who have an allergy/sensitivity to certain ingredients in foods and some have claimed that even just a minute difference between them (referring to the levels of chemicals they are allergic/ sensitive to) can make the difference between whether or not they have an adverse reaction.

You should consider discussing this issue with a health professional who possesses expertise in food sensitivities.

An interesting experiment might be to write down the Shirazes that do cause leg cramps and which ones do not. Then you can do some research on each one to find out whether they are organic, whether they are using less sulfites, if there's a particular region the wines come from, particular producer, even where the grapes might originate.

Also try eating some dried apricots, as they tend to be treated with sulfites, and see if you get the same reaction. This might help to narrow it down.

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