

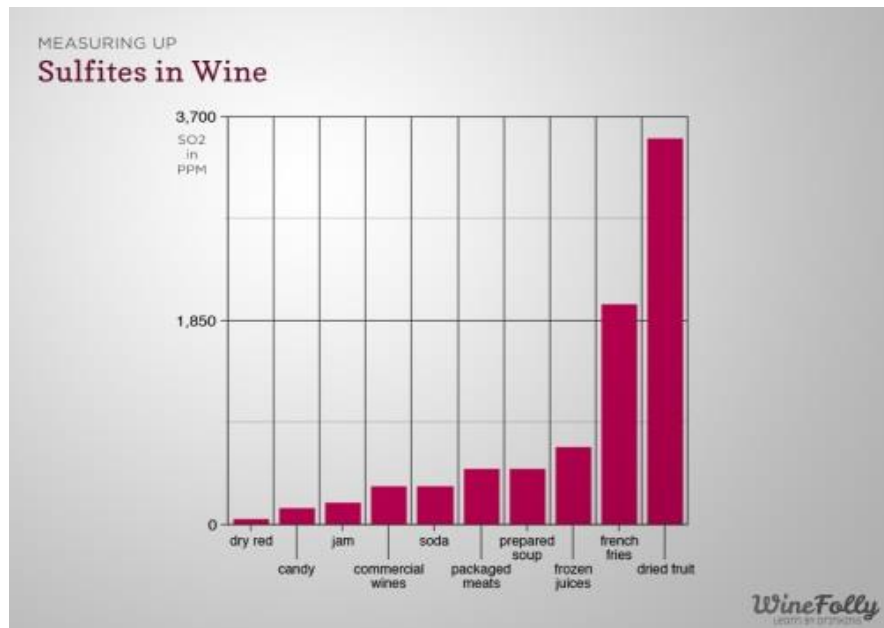
Sulphites & Wine

I WANT TO MAKE A SULFITE-FREE WINE BECAUSE I AM ALLERGIC TO SULFITES. HOW IS THIS DONE AND WHAT SHOULD I BE AWARE OF?

It is impossible to make a sulfite-free wine because wine yeast produces sulfur dioxide (SO₂) during the fermentation process. Wines with no added sulfite contain 6 to 40 ppm of sulfite, according to most experts. Furthermore, it's likely that the concentrate in kit wines already got a dose of sulfur dioxide. Before you toss out your kit, check with your Physician to make sure you really are allergic to sulfites.

Only a small percentage of the population (approximately 0.01%) is truly allergic to sulfites. These people lack the enzyme sulfite oxidase and can't metabolize sulfites. This small percentage of the population is also asthmatic. These individuals typically know they're allergic from childhood and so know to avoid foods and beverages that contain sulfites including, but not limited to, lunchmeats, processed salami, processed fruit juices, packaged seafood and dried fruits.

Sulfur dioxide gets a bad rap because of the government warning label on wine bottles that is only targeted to this select group of consumers. Furthermore, many people blame sulfites for symptoms that are often simply caused by alcohol. There has been some speculation in the medical community that histamines are a possible culprit of this "red wine malaise," but there has been no conclusive evidence so far.



Stacking up Sulfites in Wine

Ironically, many consumers drink white wine, thinking red wines have more sulfites, when actually white wines typically do. If you want to lessen the amount of sulfites you use in your wine, keep the following things in mind. Sulfur dioxide is used for two reasons: its anti-microbial ability and its anti-oxidant capacity. Therefore, if you want to use less of it, minimize the amount of microbes and oxygen that contact your wine in every stage of its life.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, using sulfites in wine making is usually not a health issue. Judicious sulfite use can significantly increase the quality of your wine. International regulatory boards usually set legal limits at around 350 ppm total sulfur dioxide and most commercial wines are bottled with totals between 50-100 ppm. A little bit of SO₂, used wisely, goes a long way and won't hurt 9,999 out of 10,000 of us.