HEALTH BENEFITS OF CHERRIES

Red Cherry Contains Rich Source of Anthocyanin Antioxidants

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Recent studies confirm that tart cherries reduce inflammation and pain and offer protection against neurodegenerative diseases.

Anthocyanins

As a follow-up to several earlier studies, researchers have confirmed that tart red cherries (Prunus cerasus) offer benefits for patients with autoimmune neurodegenerative and connective tissue diseases, particularly rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes. Studies show that tart red cherries reduce pain and inflammation and also offer protection against cancer. These effects are caused by plant phytochemicals known as anthocyanins.

The Evidence

Scientists at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore discovered that the anthocyanins in tart cherries effectively reduced painful inflammation in an experimental animal model comparable to that obtained with the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, indomethacin. The researchers believe that this effect may stem from the ability of anthocyanins to reduce oxidative stress, which is a major cause of autoimmune disease.

In a related study, researchers demonstrated that tart cherry anthocyanins may help prevent muscle pain related to intensive exercise. Young men who incorporated tart cherry juice into their daily diet experienced decreased symptoms of exercise-induced muscle damage. In addition, cherries may offer protection against gout, a painful inflammatory condition caused by urate crystals infiltrating joint fluid.

Food Sources

The benefits of tart cherries are found in fresh, frozen, canned or juice forms of cherries. High levels of anthocyanins are found in both tart and sweet cherries. In one study, women who ate two servings of Bing cherries daily experienced decreased markers of inflammation and reduced serum urate levels. However, tart cherries offer far more benefits than sweet cherries. Tart cherries are very rich sources of anthocyanins whereas sweet cherries have lower amounts.

Tart cherries include the Montmorency and Balaton varieties and are produced primarily in Michigan. In general, the darker the cherry color, the higher the anthocyanin content. The Fruit Advantage Tart Cherry dietary supplement is another rich source of tart cherry, containing 1200 mg/serving.

Pain Relief

Researchers believe that the pain relief associated with cherries may not come from a specific antioxidant in the cherries, but from the synergistic effect of all the natural compounds found in cherries. The skin of the cherries holds most of the essential antioxidants vital to their health benefits.

Tart cherries are also one of the only natural food sources of the hormone melatonin, which is a potent antioxidant with immunomodulating properties. In addition, tart cherries contain phenolic compounds that protect against neurodegeneration. Tart cherries are also rich in vitamin C, and they provide potassium, magnesium, iron, folate, and fiber.

Cancer Reduction

Cherries are particularly beneficial in reducing the risk of colon cancer. In animals studies of mice prone to colon cancer, the addition of cherries to their diet resulted in a reduction in colon tumors and their size. In related studies, cherries also reduced the growth of breast cancer cells.

Resource:

Steve Goodman, Cherries: Powerful Pain Relief, Cancer Defense, and Neuroprotection, Life Extension Foundation Journal, Nov 2007: 81-83.

Kim DO, Heo HJ, Km YJ, Yang HS, Lee CY, Sweet and sour cherry phenolics and their protective effects on neuronal cells, Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry, Oct 2001; 49(10): 4898-4902.

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