

# A cup of blueberries a day keeps the doctor away



In a new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* researchers demonstrated the benefits of eating a cup of freeze-dried blueberries every day.

The subjects were overweight or clinically obese (with BMI > 25), ages 50-75, all with three or more features of metabolic syndrome (increased central adiposity, high triglycerides, low HDL cholesterol, hypertension, and/or impaired fasting glucose).

Over a six-month period, they were administered either 1/2 or 1 full cup of freeze-dried blueberries daily.

While there was no impact on blood sugar control, many markers of circulatory performance were improved in the group receiving 1 cup (27 grams) daily. The effect was dose-dependent, because the consumers of the 1/2 cup (13.5 grams) serving enjoyed no advantages over subjects receiving placebo powder.

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There were measurable improvements in arterial flexibility, endothelial function, nitric oxide, HDL cholesterol, and Apolipoprotein A. The authors conclude that these changes conferred a 13% reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. They urge: "The simple and attainable message to consume 1 cup of blueberries daily should be given to those aiming to improve their CV health."

Of interest is that this study used freeze-dried blueberries, which might seem to vindicate audacious claims that similarly-prepared fruit and veggie caps really deliver some of their vaunted benefits. But keep in mind that sheer economics dictate that the contents of these products be derived from cheaper fruits and veggies; plus, at the recommended dosage—generally less than 10 grams per day—they're under the threshold of efficacy demonstrated in this study.

For practical purposes, a packet of freeze-dried blueberries from Thrive Market containing an ample 34 grams costs \$5.29. I calculated that a six-month course of therapy consisting of 4/5 of a packet per day would set you back \$756!

But here's a comparison: A recent study evaluating the efficacy of statins in the prevention of cardiovascular disease in a comparable population of patients with metabolic syndrome demonstrated a reduction in cardiovascular events of 16%. Factoring in the costs of drug therapy, the researchers estimated that "the costs per quality-adjusted life-year gained with statin treatment was estimated at \$6750."

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While a generic statin drug now costs less than a dollar a day, blueberry consumption is not associated with any known side effects like muscle pain, fatigue, liver abnormalities, or deterioration of blood sugar control.

And it's not an either/or. In the study above, even when blueberries were consumed by subjects already taking a statin, additional cardiovascular protection was achieved.