

Cranberry helps prevent heart disease, diabetes risk factors

written by Dr. Leo Galland | August 12, 2015

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Like cranberry? Researchers find polyphenol-rich cranberries to be a sustainable lifestyle approach to better health.

A new study reveals that drinking low-calorie cranberry juice cocktail may help lower the risk of chronic diseases that rank among the leading causes of death worldwide, including heart disease, diabetes and stroke.

It shows that cranberries provide a rich source of protective compounds – called polyphenols – that support our body's natural defenses and help us achieve a balanced lifestyle to improve health.

According to the World Health Organization, these diseases annually claim 15.6 million lives around the globe. They are among the most common and costly health conditions, but fortunately, they are also among the most preventable through dietary intervention.

Sipping Your Way to Better Health

To discover the extent to which polyphenol-rich cranberries can bolster whole-body health, researchers from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provided eight weeks' worth of meals to 56 healthy adult volunteers (average 50 years of age). One group drank a glass (8 oz) of low-calorie cranberry juice twice daily (16 oz total). Meanwhile, the other group drank a placebo beverage with a similar color and flavor.

"At the start and end of the experiment, the researchers measured things like blood pressure, blood sugar levels, blood lipids, as well as C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation," explained Christina Khoo, PhD, Director of Research Sciences at Ocean Spray. "All of these measurements come together to tell a story. The worse off these numbers are in an individual, the more likely he or she will face a health condition like diabetes, heart disease or stroke in the future."

Individuals drinking two glasses of low-calorie cranberry juice a day improved across all these measures. It's a change that adds up, and could be associated with a 10 percent lower risk of heart disease and a 15 percent lower risk of stroke. The reductions in blood pressure numbers alone matched those achieved from top-rated diets such as DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension), an eating pattern regarded as the gold standard for lowering blood pressure after several successful studies by the National Institutes of Health.

Power-Packed with Polyphenols

“These findings suggest that polyphenols help to protect our bodies, and may be adept at keeping a large number of ailments at bay,” said Dr. Khoo. “Luckily for us, a rich source of polyphenols is only a glass of cranberry juice away. Among the commonly consumed fruits in our diets, cranberries boast some of the highest levels of polyphenols – more than apples, blueberries, grapes or cherries.”

Incorporating these tart-tasting berries into our daily diets is a sustainable and practical lifestyle approach that holds notable promise for improving health. In addition to the cardiometabolic effects of polyphenols, cranberries also contain unique proanthocyanidins (PACs) that may help prevent certain bacteria from sticking inside the body.

Track Record of Whole-Body Health

The study echoes early research results that showed cranberry products as part of a healthy diet and balanced lifestyle. Two recent studies found that those who regularly drink cranberry juice are more likely to be normal weight, have significantly lower waist circumference and showcase improved heart health characteristics. Add these benefits to cranberry’s known track record of maintaining urinary tract health, and you have the makings of quite the all-star berry.

Reference:

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3. “Adult consumers of cranberry juice cocktail have lower C-reactive protein levels compared with nonconsumers,” Duffey KJ et al. Nutrition Research. 2015; 35.2: 91-174