



Berries: The New Superfood

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Imagine a food that could potentially lower your risk for heart disease, cancer, mental illness, obesity, and blindness. What if eating such a food could also improve your circulation and digestion, slim your waistline, improve your mood and boost your libido? What if this food were also easy to obtain and, wonder of wonders, delicious as well?

Fortunately, we don't have to simply dream of a food that can do so much good for our health. Truly worthy of the moniker "superfood," berries pack an almost unbelievable amount of nutrition into their tiny, brightly colored

packages. In hues of rich red, deep blue, indigo and purple, these nutritional nuggets seemed to have been designed by God to get our attention. And for good reason – berries are arguably one of the most healthful foods known to man.

From old standards like strawberries, raspberries, blackberries and blueberries to more exotic varieties like mangosteen, acai and goji, berries have been a part of the human diet for generations. Blueberries were probably the first snack food consumed in North America. Native Americans used to sun dry and smoke them to store them for



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the winter months. Strawberries have a history of more than 2200 years. Wild strawberry plants were found in various parts of Italy as long ago as in 234 BC. Thought to have been cultivated in ancient Rome in large scale for medicinal purposes, the tasty red fruits were even widely used as an aphrodisiac in 13th century Europe.

Raspberries, a consumer favorite since medieval times, were thought to originate in Asia Minor, but there are Roman records dating back to the 4th century AD. In many cultures, raspberries have commonly been used during pregnancy (usually in teas) for combating the nausea and vomiting that accompany morning sickness.

Today, savvy “foodies” know that berries add more than just flavor to modern meals. From fiber to phytonutrients, berries pack a powerful nutritional punch. And even though supplements are available that can supply us with many needed vitamins and minerals, scientists are discovering that whole foods – like fresh berries — contain many unknown compounds that

aid our health. The phytochemicals, flavonoids, anthocyanins, and compounds like quercetin and ellagic acid, are the “secret ingredients” placed in berries by their Creator to keep us healthy. These provide an antioxidant effect, countering the natural oxidation in the body that contributes to aging of the tissues and many degenerative illnesses such as cancer, dementia, and damage to the arteries. One study of blueberries in the diet even showed improved memory of middle-aged rats. In fact, it’s hard to think of a body part that isn’t positively affected by these nutrients.

Here’s how berries work their magic:

Cancer Prevention

Christine Sardo, who manages clinical trials on berry consumption and cancer prevention for Ohio State University’s College of Medicine says eating berries is a great way to prevent cancer naturally. “We are promoting the concept of ‘fruitaceuticals’ as opposed to pharmaceuticals for cancer, and emphasizing prevention vs. treatment,” she says. It has also been widely recognized that certain compounds within berries, such as anthocyanins (which give berries their color), may be responsible for their most significant cancer prevention effects. Resveratrol has been shown to inhibit the growth of cancer cells in animals.

Heart disease prevention

The high fiber content, those brilliant antioxidants and the ability to

dissolve the ‘bad cholesterol’ make the berry an ideal dietary supplement to fight heart disease. Consuming them might also strengthen the cardiac muscles. Numerous studies indicate that consuming berries – blueberries in particular – can help lower blood pressure.

Weight control

A University of Michigan Cardiovascular Center study suggests that berries may help reduce belly fat and risk factors for cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome. So far, we know that the fruit works on rats, which were the test subjects. A blueberry-enriched powder was mixed into the rats’ diet, which was either low-fat or high-fat rat chow. After 90 days, the rats with the blueberry-enriched diet had less abdominal fat,, lower triglycerides, lower cholesterol and improved fasting glucose and insulin sensitivity. In another study, those who consumed an extract of blueberries reduced their food intake by eight percent.

Healthy vision

Blueberry extract has been found in clinical studies to slow down visual loss, preventing or delaying age related ocular problems like macular degeneration, cataracts, and myopia. The antioxidants in berries (particularly lutein), in addition to other nutrients such as vitamin C, vitamin E and vitamin A, selenium, zinc and phosphorus are very beneficial and essential for eye health. Data reported



in a study published in the Archives of Ophthalmology indicates that eating three or more servings of fruit such as berries per day may lower your risk of age-related macular degeneration, the primary cause of vision loss in older adults, by 36 percent, compared to persons who consume less than 1.5 servings of fruit daily.

Anti-aging and Mental Health

The nutrients in berries might prevent and heal neurotic disorders by preventing degeneration and death of neurons, brain-cells and also by restoring health of the central nervous system. They might even heal damaged brain cells and neuron tissues and keep memory sharp. Researchers found that diets rich in berries significantly improved both the learning capacity and motor skills of aging animals, making them mentally equivalent to much younger ones.

Digestion

The fiber in berries, and their high water content, can keep away constipation, while the vitamins, sodium, copper, fructose and acids improve digestion.

Immunity

Berries have the highest antioxidant capacity of all fresh fruit, making them natural immunity builders. The selenium, zinc and iron they contain promote immunity by raising hemoglobin and oxygen concentration in the blood.

When it comes to immunity, vitamin C has probably been the most-studied, and it's been shown to increase the production of infection-fighting white blood cells. One cup of strawberries contains over 100 mg of vitamin C, almost as much as a cup of orange juice.

Berries have been in the news in recent months, with varieties like acai (pronounced ah-sigh-ee) garnering lots of attention. This South American palm berry is a nutrient-rich berry best known for its dark blue color, intense fruity flavor and rich antioxidant content. It's gained popularity, however, not for its use in recipes, but for its contribution to supplements that supposedly speed weight loss. Consumers should be wary, however. Claims on websites that enormous weight loss can be attributed to the supplements have no basis in scientific fact. While the acai, like all berries, is nutritious, the expensive pills and juices made from it can't work miracles. Rather, the American Dietetic

Association recommends that customers turn to fruits and vegetables they can purchase at their local produce markets.

Summer is a great time to add these powerhouses of nutrition to the family meals. Plentiful at farmer's markets and you-pick farms, they prove that good things do come in small packages!

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Fresh Berry Napoleon

Here's a simple, delicious and fun way to use fresh berries.

Serves four.

Ingredients

6 ounces blackberries

6 ounces raspberries

1/2 pound strawberries

Lime

8 ounces low-fat plain yogurt

2 tablespoons honey

8 waffle or sugar cookies

Directions:

In a bowl, gently combine blackberries and raspberries. Hull and quarter strawberries; set aside. Zest lime, and juice 1/2 lime. Process yogurt with lime zest, lime juice, honey, and half of the cut strawberries in a blender. Top each of four waffle or sugar cookies with one tablespoon strawberry-yogurt mixture, 1/3 cup blackberry-raspberry mixture, another drizzle of strawberry-yogurt mixture; sandwich with another cookie. Garnish with remaining strawberries, and serve.

(Source: Health.com)

Berry Delicious!

Most berries are naturally sweet and require little effort to prepare. Just rinse them under water and serve for a nutritious snack or dessert. Looking for more ways to add berries to your diet? Consider the following recipes, or discover more at justberryrecipes.com.

Apple Berry Cobbler

This fruit cobbler is a lighter, fresher version of the fat-laden, biscuit-topped dessert.

Serves six

Ingredients

1 cup fresh raspberries
 1 cup fresh blueberries
 2 cups chopped apples
 2 tablespoons turbinado or brown sugar
 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1 teaspoon lemon zest
 2 teaspoons lemon juice
 1 1/2 tablespoons cornstarch
 For the topping
 Egg white from 1 large egg
 1/4 cup soy milk

1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
 1 1/2 tablespoons turbinado or brown sugar
 3/4 cup whole-wheat pastry flour

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Lightly coat 6 individual oven-proof ramekins or souffle dishes with cooking spray. In a medium bowl, add the raspberries, blueberries, apples, sugar, cinnamon, lemon zest and lemon juice. Stir to mix evenly. Add the cornstarch and stir until the cornstarch dissolves. Set aside. In a separate bowl add the egg white and whisk until lightly beaten. Add the soy milk, salt, vanilla, sugar and pastry flour. Stir to mix well. Divide the berry mixture evenly among the prepared dishes. Pour the topping over each. Arrange the ramekins on a large baking pan and place in oven. Bake until the berries are tender and the topping is golden brown, about 30 minutes. Serve warm.

(Source: Mayo Clinic)

