



Healthy Bytes Article November 2017 Cranberries

Health Benefits of Cranberries

By Stephanie Polizzi, MPH, RDN



As we plan for the holidays, it seems most families include some form of cranberries with their Thanksgiving feast. What a shame we only use this healthy fruit once a year. Cranberries are a “super food,” with high levels of antioxidants that protect us from disease.

Historically, Americans prefer sweetened cranberry products like jellied with our holiday turkey, juiced and mixed with apple juice for a cranberry cocktail, or dried to sprinkle in salads or muffins. Others use them in decorating. But cranberries are a highly nutritious fruit that has powerful health benefits that we can consume year-round.

Cranberries are rich in phytonutrients (phyto means plant). Phytonutrients are plant-based compounds that have a beneficial biological effect on human tissues. Some of the cranberry phytonutrients include vitamins C and K, and polyphenolic (poly-FEE-nol-ik) antioxidants like phenolic acids, flavonoids and ellagic acid, tannins and terpenes. You don’t have to know what these compounds are to reap their health benefits. These compounds have been shown to lower cholesterol, reduce inflammation, lower blood sugar and protect against urinary tract infections.

Since cranberries are low in sugar, they are also low in calories, and contain natural dietary fiber. This also means these berries can be very tart. Supplement manufacturers extract some of the healthful ingredients to create powders, capsules and tablets. However, supplements are not regulated by the FDA, so content of beneficial ingredients may be erratic and not as dependable as consuming the whole fruit.

Cranberries can add zing and color to many of your year-round, everyday dishes. It’s easy to chop them into salads, slaws, salsas, muffins, pancakes or stuffing. Try adding to smoothies, cream cheese or oatmeal. Make cranberry syrup, jam, jelly or mulled cider or toss them into your rice, pasta, or quinoa water while cooking.

However you use cranberries, make an effort to work this “super food” into your daily diet and reap the health benefits year round.