

The little cranberry that packs a big punch

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Who would think that something so little as a cranberry could yield so many health benefits? The cranberry, which is usually associated with turkey, Thanksgiving meals, and Christmas tree garlands, also surprisingly contributes to oral health.

You may already be aware that research has confirmed that cranberries are among the highest sources of antioxidants of all foods tested. Antioxidants are disease fighters. Cranberries contain potent plant chemicals, such as polyphenols and flavonoids. These chemicals have been shown to reduce the risk of certain cancers and heart disease. "Mounting scientific evidence supports the conclusion that a diet with antioxidant-rich foods such as fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of chronic diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular disease. Additionally, other preliminary studies show that cranberries contain specific nutrients that can slow cancer cell growth." (1) More research has emerged that links cranberries to fighting urinary tract infections and the prevention of stomach ulcers.

The exciting news for the dental community concerning cranberries is that the Journal of the American Dental Association has indicated that "a unique cranberry juice component, a high-molecular-weight nondialysable material (NDM), has the ability to reverse and inhibit the coaggregation of certain oral bacteria responsible for dental plaque and periodontal disease in vitro." (3) The report also showed that NDM was higher in cranberries than in blueberries and that there was no inhibition activity in raspberries, peaches, mangos and plums.

A study on tooth decay by the University of Rochester in New York has shown that cranberries can prevent harmful bacteria from sticking to teeth, thereby decreasing plaque formation. Canadian researchers have found that cranberries have strong anti-inflammatory and antibiotic properties that form a "Teflon-like barrier between P. gingivalis bacteria and gum formation." (4) This property helps to keep bacteria from adhering, thus decreasing the possibility of infection that can lead to periodontitis.

So how do we advise patients concerning cranberries? We can recommend toothpastes and flosses that have recently been manufactured that contain cranberries. We can also suggest the addition of cranberries into the diet. But we must also let patients know that cranberries and cranberry products are naturally very acidic, which can cause a temporary softening of enamel after consumption. In addition, manufacturers usually sweeten their cranberry products. There are All Natural 100% pure cranberry juices in stores like "Trader Joe's" and "Whole Foods." These don't taste nearly as sweet as the ones with added sugar (such as Ocean Spray) but are much better for you. Advise your patients to incorporate cranberries into their diets during mealtimes only and, of course, to brush their teeth after the meal.

Dentistry today is realizing the impact it can have on overall body health. We expect that dentistry will become known as oral medicine and one of our jobs will be to further educate our patients in how to achieve better health. News of the oral and overall body health benefits of the little cranberry needs to be spread to all of your patients.

References

- (1.) Press Releases, The Cranberry Institute, September 6, 2006.
- (2.) Cranberries May Prevent Periodontal Disease, OsseoNews, The World of Implant Dentistry Online, September 6, 2006.
- (3.) Weiss El, Lev-Dor R, Kashamn Y, Goldhar J, Sharon N, Ofek I. Inhibiting interspecies coaggregation of plaque bacteria with a cranberry juice constituent. *JADA*, 1998. 129:1719-1723.
- (4.) Carter, Jean; Cranberries Protect Gums, USA Weekend, September 1-3, (2006), p. 2.

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FRUIT / SERVING SIZE (g)	TOTAL PHENOLS PER SERVING (mg)
CRANBERRIES	373
1/2 cup (55)	
PEAR	317
1 medium (166)	
RED GRAPES	269
1/2 cup (80)	
APPLE	256
medium (138)	
CHERRIES	231
1/2 cup (73)	
STRAWBERRIES	195
8 medium (147)	
WATERMELON	183
1 large wedge, 2 cups diced (286)	
BLUEBERRIES	181
1/2 cup (70)	
BANANA	174
1/2 cup (126)	
GREEN GRAPES	155
1/2 cup (80)	