Cranberry Tops the List for Antioxidant Activity

Did you know that some of those very compounds that impart cranberry’s vibrant color also work in the body to reduce the risk of certain chronic conditions? For years epidemiologic studies have linked diets high in fruits and vegetables, rich sources of antioxidant flavonoids and other phenols, to a variety of health benefits – including reduced risk for cardiovascular disease and certain cancers. New research confirms that cranberry leads the pack in antioxidant activity.

Cranberry vs. other common fruits
A study by Cornell University researchers, published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, reported cranberries have the highest phenolic content (measuring soluble free and bound phenols) and antioxidant activity compared to 10 other common fruits. The total phenol content of cranberry and antioxidant activity was nearly double that of apple, the next richest source tested, followed by red grape, strawberry, pineapple, banana, peach, lemon, orange, pear and grapefruit.

Antioxidants for a healthy heart
Nutrients such as vitamin E and flavonoids, a type of phytoneutrient that is a phenol, are known to be heart healthy primarily because of their antioxidant properties. Phenols found in fruits and vegetables are thought to defend against oxidation of low-density lipoproteins (LDL), the first step in developing the “clogged arteries” that often lead to cardiovascular disease. Numerous epidemiologic research and laboratory studies demonstrating cranberry’s high antioxidant activity support this fruit’s potential in reducing the risk for cardiovascular disease (particularly heart disease and stroke) – the leading cause of death in the United States.

Cancer fighting potential
For years researchers have been studying dietary sources of cancer fighting compounds, particularly in vibrantly colored fruits and vegetables. The recent 2002 Cornell University study showed that cranberries exhibit the highest inhibitory effect on the growth of human liver cancer cells compared to other fruits tested. According to the study authors, this growth-inhibiting effect, combined with the berry’s high antioxidant activity, makes cranberries one of the most beneficial fruits for dietary cancer prevention.

Cranberries all year long
In addition to the promising studies mentioned above, cranberry’s high antioxidant and phenol content is just part of the story. Cranberries also have a distinct flavonoid compound that actually blocks some harmful bacteria from attaching to cells and can help ward off urinary tract infections. This is one fruit that’s not just color on the plate at Thanksgiving – but good for enjoying all year long!
Hot off the Presses: The Latest Cranberry News

One Bright Berry: This potent little fruit packs great potential – and not just on your plate, November 15, 2002, Health magazine.
What’s so great about cranberries besides their palate-piquing tartness? Eight ounces of cranberry juice cocktail morning and night can disable many of the antibiotic-resistant bacteria behind urinary tract infections. Some cranberry compounds may also fight the bugs that cause stomach ulcers, and the fruit’s anti-inflammatory properties may guard against heart disease.

Think again before you pass on the cranberry relish Thanksgiving Day. Scientists have spent years validating the old wives' tale that cranberry juice cures urinary-tract infections. Now, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine/National Institutes of Health, has announced the largest study to date, a four-year clinical trial, to determine just how much cranberry juice is effective in treating and preventing these painful, annoying infections that account for 9.6 million doctor visits annually.

During Thanksgiving week, Americans will eat some 80 million pounds of cranberries. Recent research suggests that there are plenty of other reasons to decorate your plate with these rich, red American berries.

Before you get too stuffed—and guilt ridden—consider what you are about to eat on Thanksgiving…. Cranberry Sauce: Cranberries are high in vitamin C and condensed tannins, the heart-healthy compounds also found in red wine. An added bonus: research shows that cranberries reduce bladder infections by sweeping away bacteria that adhere to the urinary-tract lining.

Cranberries have tannins, compounds that keep bacteria from binding to cells, thus preventing them from multiplying and causing infections. Tannins are also antioxidants that bond with free radicals and reduce their energy level so they're less damaging to the body. Antioxidants may help prevent certain cancers and contribute to cardiovascular health.