

Cherries may prove to fight cancer

BY GINA GOODMAN
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For many years it has been common knowledge, though not highly publicized, that cherries can help counteract the effects of arthritis and gout. According to many arthritis sufferers, eating cherries on a regular basis and drinking cherry concentrate can help ease pain and swelling.

However, recent research done at Michigan State University and the University of Texas Health Science Center has proven that those cups of cherries that thousands of Cherry Festival-goers consume at the Open Space every year are healthy in more ways than one.

The Montmorency tart cherry, the primary variety of cherry grown in Northern Michigan, has been found to contain numerous antioxidants, anti-inflammatory agents, and beneficial nutrients.

Possibly the most significant finding so far is that cherry extracts have been proven to inhibit cancer cells.

"Right now there's considerable interest in cherries and the ingredients that reduce cancer growth," said Dr. Russel Reiter, who headed the research project at the University of Texas. "Our research has been done with ovarian and prostate cells."

Reiter also pointed out that since aspirin has been found to lower breast cancer risk, the same is true with tart cherries.

Like aspirin, Montmorency tart cherries have been found to contain high levels of melatonin, the antioxidant that has



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Recent studies have shown that Montmorency tart cherries, the premiere cherry grown in Northern Michigan, contain high levels of antioxidants which may aid in the prevention of cancer.

been shown to help in the prevention of cellular damage. But unlike aspirin, cherries do not cause adverse effects.

"Some individuals who take aspirin over a long period of time can get gastric ulcers," Reiter said. "The melatonin in cherries has the same result, but with no side effects."

Antioxidants are believed to inhibit the cycling of highly reactive compounds, called free radicals, which occur in normal human metabolism. In certain circumstances, these compounds may be factors in diseases, especially in cancer.

According to the American Dietetic Association, antioxidants have been shown to increase immune function

and possibly decrease the risk of cancer and infection.

Based on the M.S.U and University of Texas research, tart cherries are a rich source of naturally occurring antioxidants.

"I think orally consumed cherries will prove to reduce the likelihood of cancer," Reiter said. "If you consume them on a daily basis."

This may be difficult to do for some. As it is, most people don't get the daily recommended amount of fruits and vegetables in their diets.

However, one easy way to incorporate more cherries during the day is to drink tart cherry concentrate and cherry juice.

Cherry Central in Traverse City is selling its'

Indian Summer Montmorency Tart Cherry Juice at many stores and markets in the area, as well as some nationwide.

"Consumer feedback is wonderful," said Brent Tackett, Cherry Central National Sales Manager. "We receive 10-15 e-mails every week from people wanting it who can't get it in their area. It's one of those adult drinks that's good for you and high in antioxidants."

Tackett said most of the consumers are buying the juice for ailments related to arthritis and gout, but it can have other healing powers as well.

"In some cases it can help headaches, and in others it helps people sleep better," he said. "It usually takes about 30 days for the

effects to work. Some people see results in a couple weeks."

Another way to receive the health benefits, without having to eat whole cherries every day, is with a new pill called CherryFlex.

"We came out with a powder pill," said Bob Underwood, who, along with his wife, Janet, owns Flavonoid Sciences in Traverse City. "We developed the technology to maintain over 90% of the phytonutrients in cherries. And you only need to take one a day."

The CherryFlex is used as an alternative way to get a healthy amount of the antioxidants found in whole cherries.

"What they have been doing is really quite phenomenal," said Carla Evans, nutritional marketing consultant for Flavonoid Sciences. "If a person tries to sit down and eat whole cherries every day of their life, it's kind of a difficult thing to do. So we have developed the capability of getting the nutrients you need for the heart disease, and the cancer and the arthritis."

These new experiments and cherry products that have come out in recent years have a large impact on the cherry industry as a whole.

"It's going to benefit the entire industry, because now you have, frankly, a whole, huge other market that the cherry farmers will be able to sell their whole fruit to," Evans said. "It opens up a whole new outlet for their fruit, so subsequently we won't be losing our beautiful land, because now we need that land."