



Pomegranate

Pomegranates have been enjoyed for thousands of years and are a symbol of hope, fertility and abundance in many cultures. They've been found in Egyptian tombs, eaten by Babylonian soldiers prior to battle and incorporated into Persian wedding ceremonies to symbolize a joyous future.

It's even been suggested that it was pomegranates, not apples, that grew in the Garden of Eden. This is probably not true but fun to think about. Pomegranates are sometimes referred to as the Chinese apple or "jewel of the winter" (in North America, pomegranates are in season during early winter), pomegranates are one of the world's most popular fruits.

Ruby red, delicious and nutrient rich pomegranates pack a powerful punch in safeguarding health. The primary source of pomegranate's benefits come from its antioxidant content, particularly ellagitannin compounds like punicalagins and punicalins, which account for about half of the pomegranate's antioxidant ability. It's also an excellent source of the antioxidant vitamin C, with one pomegranate providing about 40 percent of the daily requirement for this vitamin.

Pomegranate juice has been analyzed to have greater antioxidant capacity than red wine, grape juice, blueberry, cranberry juice, green tea or acai juice. It's greater capacity is primarily because it contains the most of every type of antioxidant.

Pomegranates contain three types of antioxidant polyphenols, including tannins, anthocyanins, and ellagic acid, in significant amounts. Antioxidants are nature's way of providing your cells with an adequate defense against the toxic effects of free radicals. If you don't have an adequate supply of antioxidants to help neutralize free radicals, then you can be at risk of oxidative stress, which leads to accelerated tissue and organ damage. Antioxidants may also help to lower chronic inflammation in your body. Providing your body with these important micronutrients, you will be able to resist cellular damage and aging caused by our constant exposure to pollutants.

Health Benefits of Pomegranates

Anti-cancer

Pomegranate's antioxidant activity is known to inhibit cell proliferation and invasion, and promote apoptosis (cell death) in various cancer cells. In one study, pomegranate extract was found to inhibit the growth of human breast cancer cells by inducing cell death. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center:

"In test tubes, pomegranate extracts made from juice, rind, and oil slow down the reproduction of cancer cells and may hasten their death. Some extracts also help reduce blood supply to tumors, starving them and making them smaller. Most studies have focused on breast and prostate cancer cells. In one other study, pomegranate juice extract given to mice slowed down the growth of lung tumors. However, most of these studies have been in test tubes or in animals, not humans."

In men with prostate cancer, those who drank pomegranate juice significantly lengthened the time it took for their PSA levels to double (from about 15 months to 54 months). Men whose PSA levels double in a short time are at an increased risk of death from prostate cancer, so the results suggest that pomegranate had a powerfully protective effect.

Pomegranates for Heart Health

There is evidence to suggest that the antioxidants in pomegranates also benefit your heart in a number of ways, including lowering systolic blood pressure, slowing, and even reversing the growth of plaque formation in arteries, and improving blood flow and keeping arteries from becoming thick and stiff.

According to the authors of a study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, mice that drank pomegranate juice reduced the progression of atherosclerosis by at least 30 percent.

"In this experimental study, we have established that polyphenols [antioxidant chemicals] and other natural compounds contained in the pomegranate juice may retard atherogenesis," said Claudio Napoli, a professor of medicine and clinical pathology at the University of Naples, Italy.

The research is published this week in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Pomegranates Help with Arthritis and Joint Pain

Pomegranates or pomegranate extract may help reduce joint pain and decrease inflammation in arthritis sufferers. The antioxidants in pomegranates may also help to reduce inflammation that contributes to the destruction of cartilage in your joints, a key reason for the pain and stiffness felt by many osteoarthritis sufferers. One study even found that pomegranate extract blocked the production of a cartilage-destroying enzyme. Researchers concluded:

"PFE [pomegranate fruit extract] or compounds derived from it may inhibit cartilage degradation in OA [osteoarthritis] and may also be a useful nutritive supplement for maintaining joint integrity and function."

A Possible Natural Treatment for Erectile Dysfunction

Leading erectile dysfunction drugs treat erectile problems by increasing nitric oxide production, relaxing your blood vessels, which increases penile blood flow. Pomegranate juice has been shown to protect nitric oxide and enhance its effects on certain biologic systems, which suggests it may be useful for helping erectile dysfunction.

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