

Northwest Cherry Growers

Informational Release

Crop Availability: June, July & August

Your Summertime Prescription: Sweet Cherries

At your next visit, don't be surprised if dietitians point you to one of Mother Nature's sweetest treats to remedy a variety of ailments: sweet cherries. These bright, glossy orbs are in season for only a short time, so don't pass them up while they're at their freshest and, arguably, most flavorful. Not only do they make a refreshing snack that beats the heat when eaten chilled, but they pack a mighty nutritional punch for their compact size.

Containing high concentrations of nutrients and bioactive components – such as fiber, polyphenols, carotenoids, vitamin C and potassium – sweet cherries have long been touted for certain health benefits. A [new review](#) of nearly 30 published studies confirms that this small stone fruit can help tackle some big wellness issues. Read on to learn how sweet cherries can play a part in improving five common concerns.

1. Oxidative stress

Oxidative stress occurs when free radicals and antioxidants are out of balance in your body. Under normal conditions, free radicals help the body by fighting off pathogens that can lead to infection or disease. But when antioxidants are far outnumbered, free radicals can go rogue and attack the body's fatty tissue, protein or even DNA. Once compromised, the body becomes more susceptible to various diseases over time, such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension, to name a few.

Sweet cherries are rich in polyphenols and vitamin C, which have powerful antioxidant properties. Studies have shown that eating sweet cherries can increase antioxidant capacity and reduce oxidative stress, bringing the body back into a healthy balance.

2. Inflammation

If you're among the 54 million Americans who suffer from arthritis or another rheumatic disease, sweet cherries may be able to provide some relief. Research shows that the anti-inflammatory properties of cherries can have the same effect as ibuprofen. "While fresh sweet cherries are hard to beat, frozen or dried cherries are a great alternative for incorporating the health benefits of sweet cherries year-round. They retain the sweet cherry nutrients and are a beautiful addition to everything from salads to cocktails!," said Mia Syn, registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN).

3. Gout

Gout is a form of arthritis, and sufferers tend to experience severe pain, redness and tenderness in their joints. The condition is associated with elevated levels of uric acid in the blood, levels that have been reduced with a diet incorporating sweet cherries. A recent study with gout patients found a 35 percent lower risk of gout attacks among those who consumed sweet cherry products over two days. When eating sweet cherries was combined with their prescribed medicine, specifically allopurinol, the risk of a gout attack was 75 percent lower.

4. Sleep

A good night's sleep is essential to functioning at top form during the day. With sweet cherries, you have a reliable source of tryptophan, serotonin and melatonin. Tryptophan is necessary to the development of serotonin, which, in turn, plays an important role in regulating sleep as well as mood and appetite. Adequate levels of serotonin can contribute to feelings of wellbeing, while depression has been linked to low measures. Additionally, melatonin helps maintain your body's internal clock, regulating your sleep and wakefulness patterns.

Studies have shown that the consumption of sweet cherries enhances sleep quality and quantity, and mood and anxiety also show improvement. What's the best time to eat sweet cherries to get this boost? Researchers say enjoying the fruit about an hour before bedtime can help stabilize your sleep cycle.

5. Blood pressure

Finally, studies point to a link between the consumption of sweet cherries and a lowering of blood pressure, both systolic and diastolic measures. Prolonged consumption of cherries is connected with a decrease in a potent vasoconstrictor, a compound that narrows blood vessels and restricts blood flow. Sweet cherries have also been shown to increase effective vasodilator, which helps widen blood vessels and bring blood pressure down.

Small steps toward big pay-offs

Making small dietary and lifestyle changes can result in big health pay-offs. Adding sweet cherries to your diet can make a near-term impact on common complaints, and it can reduce risks for other illnesses – such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes – down the road. Best of all, sweet cherries add color, flavor and nutrition to your life without adding guilt.