

14 Reasons Eating Grapes Makes Sense for Your Health

Written by
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Courtesy of Grapes from California

The belief that grapes have healing properties dates back to ancient times, long before scientific research gave them disease-fighting credibility.

Today, the average American consumes about eight pounds of fresh grapes per year, probably because table grapes of all colors — red, green and black — are a pleasure to eat. But there's more to the story: Grapes contain a natural mix of antioxidants that help support a healthy heart and may offer an array of other health benefits.

Scientists have been discovering exciting new facts about grapes and why they may benefit health in so many ways. Much of the research focuses on the impact of the grape

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phytonutrients, those edible plant components that appear to positively affect human health.

Phytonutrients are biologically active substances that give plants their odor, color and flavor. Research indicates these may also protect the human body from heart disease and many cancers including breast, colon, stomach, oral and leukemia. They help protect cells from free-radical damage, lending grapes a reputation for disease-fighting properties. Studies have also shown positive effects in the potential to help maintain brain health, and to combat flu virus as well as a host of age-related illnesses including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

For a sense of the current research regarding fresh grapes, here is the good news:

1. Grapes As Fat Fighter?

When you crave something refreshing — like grapes — after a heavy meal, your circulatory system may be trying to send a message. A recent pilot human study showed eating grapes with a high-fat meal helped prevent the damaging impact of that meal. Study participants who did not eat grapes with the same meal experienced a 50 percent reduction in blood flow.

2. Love Your Heart 101: Eat Grapes

Human studies have shown that eating a variety of grapes may help support a healthy heart by improving blood flow, arterial flexibility and blood vessel function. Grape components may also help prevent platelet aggregation, which can lead to clot formation.

3. Grapes Are Brain Food

In preliminary studies, grapes seem to help protect brain health by counteracting oxidative stress and inflammation, or by targeting the actions of certain genes involved in diseases of the brain, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

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4. The Basic Goodness of Grapes

A 3/4 cup serving of grapes contains just 90 calories. It has no sodium or cholesterol and virtually no fat, but it does contain potassium, vitamin K as well as a small amount of fiber and other vitamins and minerals. Plus they taste good, are widely available and maintain their fresh, crispy goodness longer than most other fruit.

5. All Eyes Are On Grapes

Grapes contain lutein and zeaxanthin, two critical carotenoids for helping to maintain eye health as we age.

6. Grapes Deliver a Payload of Antioxidants

Grapes of all colors contain a rich mix of antioxidants — including polyphenols, such as flavonoids and resveratrol. These highly beneficial antioxidants neutralize harmful free radicals to help prevent the process of oxidation that damages cells. This sounds technical, but in fact, neutralizing free radicals happens naturally when we eat foods like grapes. When free radicals are left to their own devices, a condition called “oxidative stress” occurs, which is now associated with numerous chronic diseases as well as aging.

7. The Amazing Antioxidant Resveratrol

Grapes are the main dietary source of this mighty phytonutrient. Resveratrol is a component in grape skins and is found in all three colors of grapes. Numerous studies distinguish resveratrol as a potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agent with potential to impact a wide variety of health issues from cancer to Alzheimer’s to increased lifespan.

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8. Resveratrol vs. Cancer

Many studies note resveratrol's anti-cancer activities. In laboratory studies resveratrol has been shown to hinder the effects of cancer at all three stages of its development: initiation, promotion and progression. The resveratrol in grapes — but not the resveratrol found in wine — has also been associated with a reduced risk of breast cancer.

9. LDL Cholesterol 101: Eat More Grapes

Grapes also promote healthy arteries by helping prevent the oxidation of “bad” LDL (low-density lipoproteins) cholesterol, which is a key contributor to the buildup of plaque in the arteries.

10. “Grape” News for High Blood Pressure

In a recent laboratory study, rats were fed a salty diet and their blood pressures rose as a result. When grapes were added to their diet, blood pressure levels dropped, heart function improved and inflammation was reduced throughout their bodies. These animals also showed fewer signs of heart damage compared to those who did not receive grapes in the diet.

11. A Boost for Colon Health

A pilot human study of colon cancer patients who ate 2-1/2 cups of grapes per day for two weeks showed a 47 percent decrease in the expression of genes that promote tumor growth in the colon. This benefit was observed in the healthy tissue of the subjects' colons, not the cancerous, indicating a potential role for grapes in colon health.

12. Grapes or Pain Medication for Arthritis?

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Good question. How about both? In one animal study, a grape-enriched diet significantly reduced the amount of pain related to arthritis, while the pain-reducing drug Meloxicam showed no impact on pain. Interestingly, the combination treatment of grapes and Meloxicam gave greater pain relief than either did on its own.

13. Grapes Support Men's Health

Prostate enlargement is a significant concern for many middle-aged and older men. A series of animal studies showed consuming grapes helped to protect against the loss of bladder function associated with an enlarged prostate, which can partially obstruct the urethra causing the bladder to weaken. Adding grapes to the diet provided a strong antioxidant effect and membrane-protective properties that significantly reduced and reversed bladder damage caused by a partial obstruction.

14. Kids Love Grapes

Review the research and trust your instincts, but out of the mouths of babes comes, "Mom, I want grapes!" Yes, kids love grapes. Kids view them as a fun snack and a sweet treat. Wouldn't you rather they eat a super fruit like grapes than a low-nutrient, low-phytonutrient food?

Grape Recipes to Try

Grapes are, first and foremost, a source of sustenance. They are not a drug or a cure for illness. Research into their health benefits widens our understanding of how grapes and their components can contribute to our well-being and what mechanisms are involved in the process.

Whenever you find yourself eating a cluster of fresh, juicy grapes or using them in a recipe, be assured you're contributing to your good health and overall vitality as well as enjoying one of the pleasurable fruits of life.