

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Have Another Cranberry with Merry Christmas!

Yes, the big turkey with cranberry sauce day was last month. But you can have cranberry salsa on the pork roast today, toast the holiday with some cranberry juice punch or feast on a pear and cranberry crisp for dessert. Brilliant red cranberries are perfect for celebrating Christmas. And best of all, cranberries are brilliantly wonderful for you, a bright red little package of holiday health.

Now granted, plain raw berries will not put a smile on anyone's face. They are so sour they are an instant pucker! It stands to reason – the same amount of banana has more than twice as much sugar. Grapes have half again as much sugar as cranberries. No wonder they taste sweet and cranberries are sour.

But cranberries can be sweetened with other fruits or fruit juices, with sugar or with whichever artificial sweetener you prefer. Sweetened cranberry juice, while it does have 'sugar' added, has about the same total calories as unsweetened grape juice, and only a little more than apple or orange juice. Whether the sweetness is from other fruit juices, juice concentrates or sugar, the calories are still the same. But you still get the extra benefits of cranberry.

Besides the sourness, the other big difference between bananas and cranberries is the color. Plain white cranberries would probably never be eaten. But that bright red color is more than eye candy. It's where a lot of the health benefits are hidden. The compounds that give cranberries their brilliant color are some of the antioxidants of the fruit. Stress in our lives (including holiday tensions) affects our bodies too. Too much oxidation causes all kinds of health problems, from cancer to heart disease. It might be tied to diabetes and other health issues. So a few more antioxidants to neutralize the oxidation is probably a good idea.

The color pigments and related compounds also help decrease inflammation. That means less chance of hardened arteries, strokes and heart attacks. Besides less inflammation, it seems that something in cranberries also helps make our arteries more flexible, able to bend and stretch, open and tighten as needed to keep blood flowing.

And whether it's the same compounds or something different, there's evidence that cranberries

may also help push down our 'bad' LDL cholesterol and raise the 'good' HDL cholesterol. Less cholesterol in the blood means less risk of blocked arteries and stents, fewer heart attacks or strokes.

All of this research about cranberries helping our hearts is fairly recent. Earlier studies were mostly looking at whether and how cranberries and juice would help stop urinary tract infections. What started as folk medicine passed down from generation to generation now seems to have a pretty good basis in medical science too. There's something in cranberry juice, maybe some of those bright red colors, that keeps bacteria from sticking around. If they can't stick to our insides they don't cause infections. And then we need fewer antibiotics. Pass the cranberry sauce please!

Now all of these good things do NOT mean that we should be slurping cranberry juice by the quart every day! For one thing, juice has little or no fiber. Whole berries, cooked berries, even dried berries still have their fiber. Another reason is that cranberry juice is known to interact with blood thinners (warfarin or Coumadin®). Cranberries can make them too effective, to the point they cause excess bleeding. If you are taking this type of medication, stick to just a serving or two a day of juice. And if you notice any side effects be sure to tell your doctor.

Here's an easy way to add cranberries and color to your dinner menu. Use cooking apples such as Granny Smith, Gala or Jonathan that will hold together in the baking. Garnish with a dollop of plain or vanilla Greek yogurt for a red, white and green holiday dessert.

Cran-Apple Crisp

5 C thinly sliced apples, cores removed	1 C fresh or frozen whole cranberries
2 Tbsp sugar or sweetener equivalent	1 tsp cinnamon or apple pie spice
½ C quick cooking oatmeal	3 Tbsp packed brown sugar
2 Tbsp flour	2 Tbsp margarine

Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine apples and berries in 2-quart baking dish. Stir sugar and ½ tsp spice together, sprinkle over fruit and toss gently. In separate bowl combine oatmeal, brown sugar and rest of spice. Cut margarine in with fork, 2 knives or pastry blender until crumbly. Sprinkle over apples. Bake 30 to 35 minutes until apples are tender. Serve warm, with yogurt if desired. Serves 6.

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