

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Give a Fig

I don't know where the expression came from that someone 'doesn't give a fig', meaning that they don't care at all about a topic. But nutritionally, it's a very poor choice of words, because figs are great for you! Plus, they are so sweet and delicious! And because most of the time we get figs that are dried, they will keep from weeks, if not months. Eventually figs will lose even more of their natural moisture and get dry and hard. Then you can tell how sweet they are, because the sugar will start to crystallize on the outside. They'll get bumpy and rough as they dry.

But hey, eat them long before they get to that stage! You don't want to waste all the good things they have for you. For example, a cup of figs has almost half the total amount of dietary fiber that is recommended, and that very few of us get. If you're not used to eating a lot of fiber because you can't stand another bowl of bran, have figs for a snack. But don't start with a full cup of figs! Work up gradually, so that your body gets used to the new fiber coming through.

Other nutrients that figs have and we need are magnesium and potassium. These minerals are two of the big three when it comes to helping manage blood pressure. Sure, we all know sodium makes it go up. But magnesium and potassium, along with calcium, help to bring it back down. That one cup of dried figs would give you almost 25% of the recommended amount of magnesium, and 29% of your daily recommended amount of potassium.

Figs are one of the few fruits that also have calcium. A cup of figs has just a little less than a glass of milk or ounce of cheese. So if your tummy doesn't like the lactose in milk, have some figs instead! We probably don't absorb calcium quite as well from figs as we do from milk, but we'll certainly get some, and it will still help us.

Of course, since they come from trees, figs are cholesterol free. They also have no fat and zero sodium. In this day and age, sometimes what we stay away from is as important as what we eat. Sodium is certainly one thing most of us need a lot less of.

One nutrient that figs do have and that some people do need to avoid or limit is vitamin K. We

always think of leafy greens as the main source of vitamin K. Those are usually what the doctor warns us about when we start taking blood thinners. But figs have a surprisingly high amount for a fruit. A cup of dried figs has about ¼ of our daily allotment, or 23 mcg. So, if you're on blood thinners, especially coumadin, be careful with a lot of figs.

The one other downside of our cupful of figs is that along with all the luscious sweetness comes a lot of calories. One cup of dried figs has about 370 calories! If you find fresh figs however, the calories go down to about one third of that. It's because of all the water in the fresh fruit. The same thing is true of all dried fruits such as raisins and apricots too. But dried figs are available year round, and fresh figs are much more seasonal. So if you're eating dried figs, or any dried fruit, do pay attention to the calories.

At least, because of all the fiber in figs, they do fill you up and keep you feeling full longer. And while they have a lot of sugar, the fiber will slow down how fast it goes into your blood. So you won't get as much of a rush of high sugar from figs as you would from fruits with less fiber.

If you've been blessed with a fig tree in your back yard and are facing an abundance of fresh figs, here's a treat the children (and old children) in the house will enjoy. These cookies are very simple to make, so let the kids help stir them up too.

Fig Cookies

1 cup sugar	½ cup margarine or shortening
1 egg	2 cups all purpose flour
1 tsp baking soda	1 tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt	½ tsp ground cloves or cinnamon
1 cup chopped fresh figs	½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans

Preheat oven to 350° F. Cream margarine and sugar together until fluffy. Slightly beat the egg and stir it into the sugar. Sift dry ingredients together into the mixture. Grease a cookie sheet or line it with parchment paper. Drop batter by tablespoonfuls onto prepared sheet. Bake for 15-20 minutes.

Makes 3 dozen cookies.

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