

## Grapes Give You a Grab Bag of Phytonutrients To Fight Cancer and Heart Disease

**The Folklore:** Cultivated throughout the Mediterranean region for centuries, grapes (*Vitis vinifera*) were brought to the New World in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Spanish explorers. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, John Harvey Kellogg, M.D., of cereal fame, prescribed 10 to 14 pounds of grapes daily as a remedy for high blood pressure.

**The Facts:** Table grapes come in three basic colors (green, red and blue-black) and a variety of sizes (miniature to plum-sized), shapes (round to oblong), flavors (mild and sweet to earthy, tangy, tart and spicy) and textures (tender-fleshed or firm). Grapes may also be thick or thin-skinned and come with or without seeds. Nearly all (97%) of the grapes sold in the U.S. are harvested in California from mid-May to December. During the off-season, most grapes are imported from Chile.

Once thought of as offering little more than sugar and water in the way of nutrition, grapes are now respected for their phytonutrients. They are a good source of resveratrol, the anti-cancer compound first identified in wine. They also contribute other polyphenol antioxidants, including quercetin, catechins and anthocyanins (in red and blue-black grapes). Plus grapes contain some vitamin C (17 milligrams per cup), potassium (306 milligrams) and fiber (1.4 grams).

**The Findings:** Grapes' phytonutrients—which are most concentrated in the seeds and skins—are thought to inhibit oxidation of low-density lipoproteins ("bad" LDL cholesterol), relax blood vessels, reduce blood pressure and decrease blood clotting. They may also suppress cancer cells, slow inflammation and have an anti-aging effect on the brain.

Although most research has been done on red wine (from fermented whole grapes) and grape juice, preliminary research suggests that grapes themselves are heart-protective as well. However, their phytonutrients are more concentrated when made into wine and juice.

**The Finer Points:** Select firm, plump grapes with good color and pliable stems. Store in the refrigerator in a venti-

lated plastic bag for up to two weeks; rinse just prior to eating. Be sure to chew the skin well, since that's where most of the phytonutrients reside; if you eat the seeds, you'll get even more phytonutrient punch.

Because grapes fluctuate greatly in the types and amounts of phytonutrients they contain, hedge your health bets by eating a variety. And don't forget to enjoy dried grapes (aka raisins) and 100% purple grape juice (not phytonutrient-poor white grape juice).

Grapes are the epitome of portable convenience—no peeling or cooking required. Eat them straight from the stem or toss in salads, grain dishes, yogurt and cereals. Freeze them for a cool treat by themselves or for use in smoothies. Consider buying organic, when possible; a recent report found grapes—especially imported grapes—had troublesome amounts of pesticide residues.

—Andrea Klausner, M.S., R.D.

### Practically Perfect Picnic Salad

1 cup grapes  
1 can (15 ounces) small white beans, drained  
½ cup diced celery  
¼ cup minced green onion, thoroughly washed before chopping  
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley  
Lemon-Mustard Dressing (see below)  
Lettuce leaves

**Lemon-Mustard Dressing:** Combine 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, 2 tablespoons lemon juice, 1 teaspoon Dijon-style mustard, ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper; mix well.

Combine all ingredients except lettuce and dressing. Mix well. Serve on lettuce leaves. Pour on dressing

Makes 4 servings.

**Nutritional Analysis Per Serving:** 248 calories, 10 grams protein, 8 grams fat, 37 grams carbohydrate, 9 grams fiber, 170 milligrams sodium.

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- **A vitamin B12 deficiency may accelerate bone loss in older women**, suggests new findings from the Study of Osteoporotic Fractures. Of 83 women aged 65 and older, those with the lowest B12 levels lost bone mass from the hip at a rate of 1.6% a year, compared to a loss of just 0.2% in women with adequate levels of B12. Women in this age group are more likely than younger women to have low B12 levels because of age-related problems with absorption. Poor dietary intake may also contribute. Getting plenty of B12 from foods (meat, shellfish, milk, cheese and eggs) and a multivitamin may help slow bone loss in some older women, the researchers say.

*The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, March 2004.

- **Higher blood levels of the antioxidant vitamin E may predict better physical performance in older people**, suggests research from Italy's Chianti region. In a study of 986 men and women (average age 75) who did not take vitamin supplements, those with higher blood levels of alpha-tocopherol (vitamin E) showed greater muscle strength, better walking performance and better standing balance. Oxidative damage may contribute to age-related physical decline, the researchers say; the antioxidant action of E may fend off damage.

*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, February 2004.

- **Gaining weight after age 18 may increase the risk of breast cancer in women not taking hormone replacement therapy**, according to an American Cancer Society study of more than 62,000 postmenopausal women. Women who gained 20 to 30 pounds after high school graduation were 40% more likely to develop breast cancer than women whose weight fluctuated five or fewer pounds. Risk doubled in women who gained more than 70 pounds. Experts believe excess body fat increases breast cancer risk by increasing estrogen.

*Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, February 2004.

### In Coming Issues

Real-life diet lessons from the Mediterranean.... Tips for choosing the best multivitamin.... Can you really increase your metabolism?.... Will grapefruit juice interfere with *your* medications?

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