What’s the Deal With Cherries and Gout?

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Cherries May Reduce Gout Flare-Ups

Tart cherries are becoming a natural pain-fighting tool for gout pain sufferers. The huge interest is due to the overwhelming number of research studies and also the word of mouth of fellow gout sufferers who strongly believe in its inflammation-fighting properties.

The idea that cherries may reduce inflammation, not a new concept. In fact, stories of tart cherries and their pain- and disease-fighting abilities have been passed down for generations — the earliest scientific research may go as far back as the 1950s.

About the Very First Study About Cherries and Gout

The very first study that correlated cherries and gout date back to 1950 when Dr. Ludwig W. Blau, a gout sufferer himself, noticed reduced pain and swelling after eating cherries.

He was confined to a wheelchair due to gout pain, but by eating six to eight cherries a day, the pain slowly went away. When he stopped, the pain and swelling came back again.

What’s the Big Deal?

According to researchers out of the University of Michigan, consuming about 20 tart cherries per day can reduce your risk of gout flare-ups. This is because cherries may inhibit COX 1 and COX 2 enzymes (natural pain response enzymes) and doing so, they halt inflammation in the body.

The research supports a theory that tart cherries behave in the same way as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like Aspirin and ibuprofen.

NSAIDs work by blocking chemical messages in the body to keep them from responding or attaching to COX 1 and COX 2 inhibitors. If the messages aren't delivered, the body can’t become inflamed and feel pain.

What is great about tart cherries is they are natural, so you don’t have to worry about side effects like stomach damage, a complication of long-term NSAID use.

Cherries May Lower Uric Acid

Cherries carry a rich supply of antioxidants, which are important because they inhibit chemical reactions that produce free radicals (like COX 1 and COX 2). These free radicals lead to damage of cells through processes like inflammation.

The antioxidant properties in cherries may also work to reduce uric acid levels.

As you may know, gout pain is the result of uric acid building up the body. Uric acid causes crystal-like formations that use the bloodstream to travel through the entire body. These crystals cause the pain, swelling, and redness associated with gout.

The Research

Boston University researchers conducted a study about the relationship between cherry consumption and the risk of recurrent gout flares. They found that those who ate half a cup serving of cherries (10 to 12 cherries) were 35 percent less likely to experience a flare-up. Those who consumed cherry extract had a 45 percent lower risk.

Allopurinol, a gout medication, has also been found to work well when taken with cherries. Patients in the study who took both allopurinol and cherry had a 75 percent reduced risk of a gout attack. Taking allopurinol alone only reduced the risk by 53 percent.

A different study, this time conducted on animals, suggests that cherries possess the ability to lower uric acid production. They discovered that the serum uric acid in rats with hyperuricemia significantly decreased after taking tart cherry juice.

Consuming Cherries for Gout

When treating gout, the main goal is to minimize the inflammation and lessen the uric acid concentration in the affected tissues. Tart cherries help with that as it contains very powerful antioxidants called anthocyanins which give it its distinct red color.

These antioxidants stabilize free radicals that cause inflammation and damage cells and tissue. By taking cherries for gout, the serum acid levels are decreased by increasing the excretion of uric acid.

"So How Many Cherries Should I Eat to Fight Gout?'

It depends on how much cherries you are fine with eating daily. Going back to the study of 633 participants, they found that the magic number lies between 20 to 25 cherries.

Eating three or more servings of cherries over the course of two days provided no substantial benefit. This is for preventative purposes of course.

If you experience a gout attack, go ahead and grab a bunch of tart cherries. 25 cherries are ten times more beneficial for pain relief compared to aspirin and other pain-relievers. It also contains almost 25 milligrams of anthocyanins which have very potent anti-inflammatory properties.

Consume Cherries In Different Ways

Cherries come in different forms and varieties: pies, tarts, juices, canned, frozen, and raw. You can go to your nearest health food store and find cherry juice.

You can drink this twice a day or mix two tablespoons of concentrated cherry with one cup of water. Be careful with juices that contain high levels of fructose/sugar. It can drive up your body's uric acid levels and result in a gout attack.

Always choose 100 percent cherry juice or powders with no additives or sugars added. You can check the label to make sure it is pure cherry juice. You also want to avoid cherry pie filling, syrup or brandy. These foods contain sugar and alcohol in them which counteract the benefits of cherries for gout.

Go for Raw Cherries

These are many great ways to consume cherries, but nothing beats consuming it in its pure raw form.

The great thing about tart cherries is that they are slightly lower in sugar, so you're not consuming a lot of fructose – 25 cherries is about 10 grams of fructose.

That's low compared to other fruits that have way more sugar in them. You'd have to consume more than 60 cherries to go over the limit. Remember to limit your sugar intake to no more than 25 grams a day. This includes natural sweet foods such as fruit.

Just remember that every person is different. You want to consume an amount that works best for your situation.

Listen to your body and stick to a dose that benefits you the most. Also, opt for the tart cherries as these are the most effective in fighting arthritis because they contain more anthocyanins than black and yellow cherries.

"I Don't Want to Eat 20 Cherries in a Day. Are There Other Ways?'

You only need to consume a few cherries to get the benefits, but if you can't stand the thought of chewing on dozens of cherries every single day, you can take them in supplement form.

Purchase cherry extract at a health food store near you to help lessen your gout flare-ups. The extract also contains high levels of anthocyanins which inhibit cyclooxygenase activity.

A 2010 study proves the potency of liquid cherry extract when they found that 24 patients experienced a 50% reduction in flares after taking one tablespoon of tart cherry (about 45 to 60 cherries) extract twice a day for four months.

In Conclusion

Gout is a very serious condition, and if left untreated, it can become chronic and develop into tophi.

Tophi are when microlesions appear anywhere on the body. It's extremely painful and very unpleasant to look at. With the help of cherries, you can manage your gout condition better.

Researchers are hesitant to provide a specific daily recommendation, but many gout sufferers can vouch on the potency of this powerful fruit. Of course, relying on cherries alone won't work. If you live a very unhealthy lifestyle eating all kinds of junk food and not exercising, you are bound to experience a gout attack no matter how much cherries or allopurinol you take.

Make sure to take cherries while maintaining a healthy weight, drinking moderate alcohol and decreasing the consumption of high-purine foods. A lifestyle following this combination of practices should help you manage the condition and gout symptoms better.