

BLUEBERRIES

Blueberries are the fruits of a shrub from the Ericaceae family, which also include the cranberry, bilberry, azalea, mountain laurel, and rhododendron.

More species of blueberries are native to North America than any other continent. The United States grows and supplies over half of all blueberries on a world-wide scale. I tell you this, because they are easily obtainable. Blueberries are one of the healthiest foods available, and I want to eat some every week. Now, let's see why.

Blueberries have one of the highest antioxidant capacities among all fruits and vegetables. Remember, especially in athletes, these anti-oxidants improve performance by removing damaging free radicals which exist in your body. Most of these properties are due the phytonutrient, Anthocyanins, which give the berries their color. Studies have shown blueberry antioxidant support involves the whole body. This is why some refer to blueberries as a "Superfood." Now, let's get more specific.

In addition to the antioxidant properties, blueberries are a source of fiber, Vitamins A, B, C, and E, iron, zinc, potassium, selenium, and copper.

Cardiovascular Benefits: Blueberry intake has been shown to reduce total cholesterol, lower triglycerides, and protect the cells lining blood vessel walls. Also, consumption of blueberries has been shown to support healthy blood pressure.

Cognitive Benefits: Consumption of blueberries on a regular basis has been suggested to improve memory and protect our nerve cells.

Blood Sugar Benefits: Blueberries are a low-glycemic index food. Again, this means consumption avoids large glucose and insulin spikes which harm the body. Studies have shown blueberries, and other berries, too, help blood sugar regulation, even if people are already diagnosed with Type 2 Diabetes.

Eye Health: Because of the antioxidant properties, blueberries protect eye health, especially the retina. Consumption is associated with prevention or the delay of age-related ocular problems. The carotenoids and flavonoids contained in the fruit are felt to be the main contributors to this benefit.

Digestive Tract-Due to the fiber content and antioxidant properties of the berry, the gut is protected by consumption, especially the colon.

Immune System: Consumption has been associated with fewer infections, especially involving the respiratory system and urinary tract.

Athletes are more susceptible to muscle damage secondary to overtaxing the muscles during strenuous exercise. Blueberries offer a special protection in this area, as they have been shown to reduce oxidative stress in muscle. If for no other reason, this is one reason I like to see athletes eat berries, especially blueberries.

Raw blueberries are probably best. However, frozen blueberries are fine. When blueberries are cooked, it is felt they lose some of their healthy properties. It is recommended they be eaten raw or frozen. If

consumed raw, don't wash until they are ready to be eaten, because it could lead to faster spoilage, otherwise.

Try to eat three cups of berries per week. It can be strawberries, blackberries, cranberries, or raspberries, but blueberries are what I prefer to recommend. Personally, I eat a bag of my French Toast Pro Bites along with a cup of frozen blueberries every day. By doing so, I have eaten a healthy, nutrient dense vegetable protein and a cup of fruit in one setting. I invite you to do the same. See, you've just knocked off two recommendations at the same time.

Remember, when you take great care of your body; it will take great care of you. This is especially true when under stress, such as a surgical procedure, illness, or athletic competition. By eating fruits and vegetables, you are giving your body the best chance to perform at it's highest level. Avoid empty calories, and at least give healthier choices a try every once and awhile. See the difference for yourself.

Thank you.

Dr. Steve

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Dr. Steven L. Snodgrass is a former Chief of Surgery, a member of the American Medical Association, and a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons. He created Dr. Steve's Pro Bites to help athletes and patients meet their special nutritional needs.