

Tart Cherries

Consuming plentiful amounts of cherries--or a cherry extract made from the juicy, red-blue summer berries, can provide remarkable health benefits, ranging from fighting inflammation to preventing gout, a painful joint condition. This is because the cherries most of us love to eat--including both the sweet and tart varieties--are rich in potent antioxidants called flavonoids that have various therapeutic effects on the body.

The flavonoids (specifically, anthocyanidins and proanthocyanidins) found in cherries act as antioxidants in the body, scavenging for and destroying altered oxygen compounds called free radicals. Many degenerative diseases have been associated with the tissue damage that these free radicals can cause, including cataracts, Parkinsons disease, and arteriosclerosis.

A 1996 Harvard study in published in the prestigious *Annals of Internal Medicine*, for example, reported that the flavonoids found in cherries could actually reduce the risk of death from heart attack in middle-aged men with coronary artery disease.

The best-known use for cherries is to prevent gout. Their benefits are twofold: The flavonoids help to reduce the high uric acid levels in the blood that are responsible for the development of gout itself. And flavonoids block the inflammation-causing substances released in the joint when the uric acid crystals start to accumulate. A 1999 study published in the *Journal of Natural Products* found cherries may inhibit inflammation and offer pain relief similar to aspirin and other painkillers.

Many customers prefer capsules. For example, Solaray's Tart Cherry capsule is equivalent to about 2 cups of cherries. Stop by Food For Thought for more information.

