

CRAN-TASTIC

Although you may think of cranberries only during the holidays, these red gems have more to offer on both the culinary and nutritional fronts. Whole cranberries are a perfect fit in almost any healthy diet, as they are high in fiber and low in calories and fat. One cup of fresh cranberries contains only 51 calories while offering 5 grams of fiber and 24% of the daily value of vitamin C. Vitamin C lends cranberries their distinctively tart flavor, and serves many important roles in the body. Early sailors from New England even brought cranberries on board ships as a source of vitamin C to ward off scurvy.



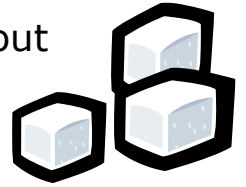
Although scurvy isn't a likely concern today, vitamin C does keep the immune system functioning and builds healthy skin and nails. In the popular media, cranberries have been associated with a number of health claims ranging from decreased risk of heart disease and diabetes to improving oral health. Perhaps the best known of these claims is that that cranberry juice can prevent or help cure urinary tract infections. In lab tests cranberry has been shown to prevent bacteria from adhering to cell walls, which may be how cranberry juice acts to prevent or treat infections. Cranberries are also a rich source of antioxidant phytochemicals. The polyphenol in cranberries are currently being investigated for their effects on lowering risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease through anti-inflammatory and blood pressure-regulating mechanisms.

Cranberry consumers should remember to check product labels, however, as cranberry juices are usually blends of juices and due to the tartness of cranberries there may be a lot of added sugars. There are many ways to incorporate cranberries into your diet as there are potential benefits from eating them. Fresh or dried cranberries can be stirred into muffin or pancake batter, or tossed in a salad. With a little creativity, this New England native can become an addition to your diet all year long.



SUGAR SHAKEDOWN

Do you ever wonder about claims made on food labels about sugar? What does it all mean? Many products are labeled “sugar-free” or “no sugar added”, but does that mean they are carbohydrate free or low calorie?



Sugar-free foods may play a role in your weight-control or diabetic diet but sugar-free doesn't mean carbohydrate-free or low calorie. When you are choosing between standard products and their sugar-free counterparts, compare the food labels side by side. If the sugar-free product has noticeably fewer carbohydrates, the sugar-free product might be the better choice. But if there's little difference in carbohydrate grams or calories between the two foods, let taste, or price, be your guide.

The same applies to products sporting a "no sugar added" label. Although these foods don't contain high-sugar ingredients and no sugar is added during processing or packaging, foods without added sugar may still be high in carbohydrates.

So what exactly do the labels mean? *Sugar-free* means “less than 0.5 grams of sugar per serving”. *Reduced Sugar* means “at least 25% less sugar than the original item” but it does not necessarily mean lower in calories. That’s because if you take sugar out of a product something else might be put in its place, such as fat, to make the product taste good. *No Sugar Added* means just that, but remember there are foods that contain sugar naturally such as fruit juice.



If you are watching your weight or trying to keep your blood sugars in check remember to check and compare food labels for the calorie and carbohydrate content.