



## 7 Health Benefits of Cherries

By **Cynthia Sass, MPH, RD**

Good news, cherry lovers: The fruit is one of the healthiest foods you can eat.

### **Cherries are full of antioxidants**

Cherries are a potent source of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds. These cellular body guards slow down aging and ward off chronic illnesses—including heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, diabetes, and obesity.

### **They protect against diabetes**

The anti-inflammatory effect of cherries helps keep your body healthy; but what's more, cherries rank lower than many fruits on the glycemic index. That means they don't trigger spikes and crashes in your blood sugar and insulin levels. This makes them both protective against diabetes, and important for managing the condition if you already have it.

### **They promote healthy sleep**

Tart cherries in particular are one of the few food sources of melatonin, a hormone that helps control your sleep-wake cycles. One study in men and women with insomnia found that compared to a placebo, eight ounces of tart cherry juice in the morning and again one to two hours before bed increased sleep time by an hour and 24 minutes.

### **They can provide arthritis relief**

Several studies have suggested that cherry consumption is beneficial for osteoarthritis sufferers. Regularly incorporating cherries or 100% cherry juice into your meal or snack routine may help lessen your joint pain.

### **They lower the risk of gout attacks**

Over eight million adults in the U.S. suffer from gout. This inflammatory arthritis is triggered when a waste product called uric acid crystallizes within the joints, causing excruciating pain and swelling. In one study, gout patients who consumed cherries for just two days (both the fresh fruit, as well as cherry extract and juice) showed a 35% lower risk of gout attacks compared to those who did not eat cherries.

### **They curb cholesterol**

Research has shown that drinking tart cherry juice can help lower total cholesterol, including the "bad" type, known as LDL. That's key because every 1% reduction in cholesterol lowers the risk of heart disease by 2%. And a high LDL is particularly worrisome in relation to heart attack risk.

### **They reduce post-exercise pain**

In other words, cherries can make that post-HIIT workout soreness less intense. They also protect against the cellular wear and tear from exercise, and help support muscle recovery. For this reason, tart cherry juice is popular with professional and competitive athletes. But it can help anyone who's regularly active.

### **How to max out the health benefits of cherries**

There's nothing like a bowl of fresh cherries when they're in season. But that's not the only way to embrace their nutritional perks. Look for frozen cherries, freeze-dried powders, 100% tart cherry juice, and preservative-free dried cherries.

Whip frozen cherries or powder into smoothies, or add it to overnight oats. Stir chopped dried cherries into nut butter or melted dark chocolate, or sprinkle onto salads and cooked veggies. Add tart cherry juice to sparkling water. Or drink it straight up if you're struggling with sleep, or want exercise recovery benefits. Making cherries and cherry products a staple part of your diet is a small shift that may snowball into big-time health benefits.

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