

Can a Cranberry a Day Keep UTIs Away?

Is it just folk wisdom, or can this very tart berry actually be used to prevent urinary tract infections?

Early Research

As early as the turn of the century, research suggested that cranberries acidified urine, thus creating an inhospitable environment in the bladder for the bacteria that causes urinary tract infections. More recent research suggests that the cranberry could have bacteria-busting mechanisms other than lowering urine pH.

Contemporary Research

Modern research shows that cranberries contain proanthocyanidins, which prevent the adhesion of certain bacteria, including E. coli, to the urinary tract wall. Bacteria that attach to the mucus lining of the urinary tract are more likely to contribute to infection, while unattached bacteria are simply eliminated with urination.

Clinical Observations

A small study involving sixteen children with spina bifida tracked the presence of white blood cells in the urine (markers of infection) while they consumed two to three glasses of cranberry juice daily. At the onset of the study, most of the children had measurable levels of both blood cell types in the urine. After two weeks of consuming the cranberry juice, the levels dropped.

Studies show positive results, but, research aside, do physicians actually order cranberry juice for therapeutic prophylaxis? Upon reviewing 176 charts, it was found that 15 residents had doctors' orders for one cranberry tab daily for the prevention of urinary tract infections.

Cranberry is available for purchase in a variety of forms. Beyond the traditional juice form, cranberry supplements can be found as extracts, teas and capsules or tablets.

More information on the cranberry's health benefits can be found at www.cranberryinstitute.org.

References

Avorn J, Monane M, Gurwitz JH, et al. Reduction of bacteriuria and pyuria after ingestion of cranberry juice. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 1994.

Howell A, Foxman B. Fewer infections may mean less antibiotic therapy. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2002.

