

Cherries for Athletes and Individuals who want to keep FIT

Recent studies suggest cherries may have powerful pain relief benefits for active adults, from elite athletes to weekend warriors.

Research from Oregon Health & Science University revealed that runners who drank cherry juice twice a day for seven days prior to and on the day of a long-distance relay had significantly less muscle pain following the race than those who drank another fruit juice beverage. Researchers believe cherries' post-exercise benefits are likely because of the fruit's natural anti-inflammation properties – attributed to antioxidant compounds called anthocyanins, which also give cherries their bright red color.

Cherries' post-exercise benefits are good news for the increasing number of active adults who feel the aches and pain of post-exercise muscle soreness. The average age of today's endurance athlete is 40-years-old (marathonguide.com). According to health and fitness experts, diet is a key part of training to manage pain.

“Most people only think about how to manage post-workout pain, not realizing that pain management and the ability to maximize muscle recovery starts before you even put on your shoes,” said Leslie Bonci, sports dietitian and Director of Sports Nutrition at the University of Pittsburgh. “I recommend tart cherry juice to my athletes because it is a natural, anti-inflammatory option that provides additional nutrition value such as antioxidants and carbohydrates. Cherry juice is also extremely convenient to incorporate into a routine because it is available all year round and easy to take on the road.”

Incorporate tart cherries into your day for increased pain relief and performance.

Cherries - A Nutrition Powerhouse

Cherries' powerful package of antioxidants and phytonutrients delivers:

- **Anthocyanins** – Unique antioxidants that are responsible for cherries' deep red color...and for the fruit's anti-inflammatory benefits. Researchers suggest cherries may work like common pain medications used by athletes to reduce post-exercise muscle soreness.
- Red foods, from cherries to red grapes to raspberries, contain powerful anti-inflammatory benefits. But what's unique about cherries is that they contain specific anthocyanins 1 and 2 that have been shown to relieve the pain associated with inflammation, which can have a significant impact on relieving muscle and joint soreness more quickly and effectively.
- A recent study by Oregon Health and Sciences University revealed that runners who drank cherry juice twice a day for seven days prior to and on the day of a long-distance relay had significantly less muscle pain following the race. Cherries are available year-round as dried and frozen cherries and cherry juice, and are a convenient, portable option to support any training routine.

- **Melatonin** – A potent antioxidant that may help improve the body’s natural sleep patterns. Health and wellness experts agree that how long and how well you sleep may impact overall quality of your training.
- **Other antioxidants** – Cherries contain at least 17 antioxidants, including powerful antioxidants gallic acid, p-coumaric acid, kaempferol and quercetin, an antioxidant that may help boost immunity...keeping your training schedule on track.
- **Essential nutrients** – Cherries are a good source of vitamin A (beta carotene) and also contain fiber.

Leslie Bonci, M.P.H., R.D., LDN, CSSD

A nationally-recognized sports dietitian, Leslie Bonci is the Director of Sports Nutrition in the Department of Orthopedic Surgery and the Center for Sports Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. Bonci is a board certified specialist in Sports Nutrition and consults with the WNBA and NCAA. Bonci has also contributed to the ADA sports nutrition manual and is a veteran textbook author.