

Natural Anti-Inflammatory Power of Tart Cherries May Help Relieve Post-Exercise Muscle Pain

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Drinking cherry juice could help ease the pain for people who run, according to new research from Oregon Health & Science University presented at the American College of Sports Medicine Conference in Seattle, Wash. The study showed people who drank tart cherry juice while training for a long distance run reported significantly less pain after exercise than those who didn't. Post-exercise pain can often indicate muscle damage or debilitating injuries.

In the study of sixty healthy adults aged 18-50 years, those who drank 10.5 ounces cherry juice (CHERRish 100% Montmorency 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. On a scale from 0 to 10, the runners who drank cherry juice as their "sports drink" had a 2 point lower self-reported pain level at the completion of the race, a clinically significant difference.

While more research is needed to fully understand the effects of tart cherry juice, researchers say the early finding indicate cherries may work like common medications used by runners to alleviate post-exercise inflammation.

"For most runners, post-race treatment consists of RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation) and traditional NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)," said Kerry Kuehl, M.D., a sports medicine physician and principal study investigator. "But NSAIDS can have adverse effects - negative effects you may be able to avoid by using a natural, whole food alternative, like cherry juice, to reduce muscle inflammation before exercise."

The researchers suggest cherries' post-exercise benefits are likely because of the fruit's natural anti-inflammation power - attributed to antioxidant compounds called anthocyanins, which also give cherries their bright red color.

Whether elite athletes or weekend warriors, this natural anti-inflammation power of cherry juice could have far-reaching benefits for the millions of active Americans currently taking over-the-counter pain medications to reduce muscle pain and beyond. A growing body of research suggests cherries could affect inflammation related to heart disease, arthritis and may even help maintain muscle strength for those suffering from fibromyalgia (a common, chronic widespread pain disorder), according to a second study presented by the same researchers at the ACSM conference.

It's Easy to Enjoy "America's Super Fruit"

Cherries are not only good for you, but they're also a homegrown "Super Fruit." According to recent data, more than 9 out of 10 Americans want to know where their food comes from, nearly 80 percent say they're purchasing "locally produced" products, and the majority are defining "local" as made in America.

This homegrown advantage, coupled with potential health benefits for athletes, make cherries "America's Super Fruit." Tart cherries come in dried, frozen and juice forms so they're readily available to enjoy all year long.

Kuehl KS, Chestnutt J, Elliot DL, Lilley C. Efficacy of tart cherry juice in reducing muscle pain after strenuous exercise. American College of Sports Medicine. 851. May, 2009.

Jones KD, Elliot DL, Kuehl KS, Dulacki K. Tart cherry juice for fibromyalgia: new testing paradigm and subgroup benefits. American College of Sports Medicine. 852. May, 2009.

Surveys conducted IRI Data and The Hartman Group, 2008