A+ for Apples

Did you know that Apples, which are considered a staple among fruits in many parts of the world, actually belong to the rose family? This wonderful botanical classification also includes other fruity favorites such as peaches, plums, pears, apricots, strawberries, and blackberries. Is your mouth watering already?

A favorite fruit of the ancient Greeks and Romans, apple trees originally grew in Eastern Europe and southwestern Asia. They now thrive in temperate climates nearly worldwide. The wide selection of apples available offers a tantalizing variety of colors—beautiful palettes of green, yellow, and red shades, flavors—mild, sweet, tart, fragrant, aromatic, tangy, sour, or spicy, and textures—tender, creamy, crisp, crunchy, firm, or juicy! Pretty and practical (they store well for longer periods and are easy to take on outings); apples might be voted a long-time favorite of many. Speaking of old-timers, what about that seasoned saying—can an apple a day really keep the doctor away? Let’s take a look at some of the healthful benefits this common fruit has to offer.

A Plus for the Cardiovascular System

Rich in antioxidants, potassium, vitamin C, and fiber, apples indeed do afford us much more than eating enjoyment. Science is demonstrating that these tasty treats of nature are packed with nutritional goodies that can boost our health from head to toe! When Finnish researchers followed 5,000 adults for more than 20 years, those subjects who ate the most flavonoid-rich foods, specifically apples and onions, had a 20 percent lower risk of heart disease than those who ate the least of these foods.
One medium unpeeled apple provides over three grams of fiber. A medium peeled apple has 2.7 grams of fiber. The soluble fiber, pectin, can reduce LDL (“bad cholesterol”) production in the liver, while other types of fibers in the apple decrease its absorption. Adding just one large apple to a daily menu can reduce serum cholesterol about 8 to 11 percent! This is encouraging news, because for every 10 percent drop in total cholesterol, there is, on the average, a 20 percent reduction in an individual’s risk of heart disease.

Recently researchers at the University of California demonstrated that flavonoid-rich apple extracts inhibit inflammation within arteries. Chronic inflammation within the arteries pushes development of atherosclerosis. Another point to consider: some studies suggest that individuals, who eat the greatest number of apples, when compared to those who consume the smallest amount, reduce their risk for stroke caused by a blood clot.

**May Reduce Your Risk of Cancer**

Italians have discovered a consistent inverse association between consumption of apples and the risk of various cancers (oral cavity, pharynx, colorectal, larynx, and breast). Scientists at Cornell University have demonstrated that whole apple extracts prevented breast cancer in mice in a dose-related response. The more apples eaten, the greater the protection. Frequent consumption of apples might help prevent another type of cancer as well. For example, women who eat at least one apple or pear a day have reduced risk of lung-cancer. Another study involving 582 patients with lung cancer and 582 control subjects found that there was a 40 to 50 percent decrease in lung cancer in individuals who consumed the highest intake of apples, onions, and white grapefruit, compared to those who ate the lowest amount of these foods.

When compared to other commonly-consumed fruits, laboratory experiments demonstrate that apples had the third highest ant proliferative activity against tumor cells. Note, however, that apples eaten without the peel appear to be less protective, as shown by laboratory cultures in a study involving rodents. Another study by French researchers has demonstrated that the apple phytochemical procyandin can trigger the death of certain colon cancer cells in vivo.

**Helpful for the Lungs**

A recent study in Australia involving 1,600 participants found that apple and pear intake was associated with a decrease in bronchial hypersensitivity and asthma. A Finnish study involving 10,000 men and women showed that intake of both apples and oranges was associated with a reduced incidence of asthma. In the Netherlands also, a study of more than 13,000 adults found that regular consumption of apples and pears was associated with good pulmonary function. Those who ate apples often showed improvement in the amount of air they could force out of the lungs in one second.

**A Good Choice for Diabetes**

Regular consumption of apples can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. A study conducted by Brigham and Women’s Hospital involving 38,018 women aged 45 or older, found that women who consumed one or more apples a day had a 28 percent reduction in risk of developing diabetes when compared with those who consumed no apples.

Whether the doctor is kept away we can’t guarantee, but we can almost be sure that you will appreciate the culinary satisfaction and bushel of health benefits these rosy treats of nature offer! And remembering that their Designer tenderly regards you as the apple of His eye, bestows the greatest blessing of all.

**To retain the most nutrient quality:**

Store in the refrigerator (apples ripen six to eight times faster at room temperature than if refrigerated.)

Eat the peel when possible. Apple peels have two to six times the antioxidant activity, and two to three times more flavonoids than does the flesh. Before eating or using, wash the fruit in warm soapy water or with a produce cleanser, and rinse well.