

Berry-licious Nutrition

Jennifer Hutchison has the lowdown on the nutrition benefits of berries

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I have a love-hate relationship with summer time training. I have a tough time embracing the suffering one endures training for Ironman during the warmest part of the year. I do, however, find sweet reward knowing that when my sweat drenched workout is done that I can help jump start the recovery process by taking advantage of vast quantities of fresh fruit you can find at this time of year.

National health organizations recommend we eat a minimum of two to four servings of fruit per day (or approximately 2- 4 cups). Surprisingly over 60 per cent of Americans fall short of this goal. The benefits of adding more fruit to your training diet are many. Intake of these naturally low fat, low sodium, cholesterol free foods supply antioxidant nutrients which can not only help combat the oxidative stress from training, but also help protect the body from chronic health issues such as heart disease and some cancers. These carbohydrate rich, fiber containing foods also supply the muscles with energy and provide the roughage to help maintain a healthy GI tract.

In the US, the months of May thru August tend to be the time you will find the greatest abundance reasonably priced fresh fruit. Summer time is when you will find a plethora of the tiny powerhouse fruit known as berries. In general terms, a berry is defined as an edible fruit with multiple seeds. Most people know blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, cranberries, boysenberries and currants as mainstream berries. Botanists (those that study plant life) will quickly point out

those “true” berries are actually fruit with seeds on the inside. So technically speaking, strawberries, raspberries and blackberries are not berries. (But tomatoes, bananas, grapes and pomegranates are!) So, to keep things simple, this article will mainly focus on the some of the berries I like to include in my training diet: blueberries, strawberries, raspberries

Why are berries nutritionally superior fruits?

These colorful little treats are a nutritional powerhouse because they are one of the most “nutrient dense” (code word for packed full of good stuff) fruits you can find. Most berries are exceptional sources of vitamins, minerals (Vitamin C, potassium) and phytochemicals. Phytochemicals are substance found in plants that foster health and prevent disease. The Phytochemicals found in the whole fruit is going to be more powerful than anything found in the pill form. Antioxidant nutrients are a subgroup of phytochemicals and include flavonoids (quercetin and anthocyanins) and ellagic acid to name a few.

It should be noted that different berries offer different benefits. You may see the term ORAC value associated with berries. This stands for Oxygen Radical Antioxidant Capacity. Basically it is a test that identifies the total antioxidant score of a particular fruit or vegetable so the higher the score the more nutrient rich and beneficial the food.

Blueberries: Hands down these tiny purple blue orbs pack a solid nutritional punch with one of the highest ORAC values of 5486. Just one cup provides only 80 calories and offers up vitamins C plus the flavonoids, quercetin and anthocyanidin.

Strawberries and Raspberries: Although these red berries are not ranked as high as blueberries (strawberries ORAC is 3520 and raspberries ORAC is 2789), they both supply a hardy dose of Vitamin C as well as flavonoids such as catechin in addition to quercetin and anthocyanidin. One cup provides 50 to 60 calories respectively.

Want to know how to fit in more berries into your training diet? Try the tips and recipe below

- Add berries to your cereal or yogurt
- Add berries to your pancake or muffin batter
- Add berries to your salads and compliment the flavor by using a raspberry vinaigrette dressing
- Make a berry sauce/ syrup. Combine one cup berries with one Tbsp Sugar. Microwave for 30-60 seconds until warm enough to mash the berries. Spoon on top of whole grain waffles, pancakes or blend this in to your hot cereal.
- Blend 8 oz Pomegranate juice (150 calories per cup) with ½ c fresh or frozen blueberries, ½ c strawberries and one or two scoops of whey or soy protein powder and crushed ice.
- Drizzle a little chocolate sauce over partially frozen berries to satisfy your sweet tooth.
- Better yet, add berries to fat free/low fat vanilla or chocolate ice cream or pudding for a sweet creamy delight!

No Cook Berry Yummy Summer Oatmeal

Makes four 1 ¼ cup servings

1 serving provides 325 calories/ 49 grams Carbohydrate/ 18 gm Protein / 7 gm Fat

8 oz Nonfat/ Reduced Fruited Yogurt (Blueberry or Strawberry)

8 oz Nonfat or 1% Cottage Cheese (Puree in a blender so it's the consistency of sour cream)

1 cup Whole Rolled Oats

1 cup Fresh or Frozen Blueberries

1 cup Fresh or Frozen Strawberries

4 Tbsp fresh ground flaxseed

Combine yogurt, puree cottage cheese and rolled oats in a bowl. Let stand for 15 minutes to allow the oats to absorb the moisture from the yogurt and cottage cheese. Fold in berries. If using frozen berries, thaw slightly before mixing them in. Ground flaxseed can be mixed in or added just before serving. Divide into four equal servings. To increase the carbohydrate content for a pre or post workout meal or snack, drizzle one Tbsp honey (60 calories / 17 gms carbohydrate) and add ½ cup more of your favorite fruit.

As mentioned, fresh berries are plentiful during the summer months. Fresh berries are preferred but know that you can still benefit from the antioxidant power of these fruits in the frozen and dried forms. Frozen fruit can have as much as, if not more, nutritional value than fresh. The key with buying frozen is to make sure it is without added sugar. The only down side to buying frozen is when thawed they tend to be much softer. Dried berries are much smaller than their fresh counterpart so a serving would be about a ½ cup. Dried fruit are easily packed so are a great alternative to fresh if you are traveling frequently.

Fall and cooler weather are only a couple months away so enjoy the summer time treat of fresh berries while you can!

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References for this article are available upon request.

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