



## Benefits Beyond Coloring Your Plate

by Sarah Muntel, RD

### Raspberries, blackberries, blueberries and strawberries !

Are these foods the healthiest foods on earth? These plump, juicy fruits are full of fiber, antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Who wouldn't want to add them to their day? They are colorful, tasty treats which also happen to be power foods that pack a serious punch. How do you get their maximum benefit and where do they fit into your nutritional plan?

First, let's talk about berries. Did you know there are many different types of berries to choose from? Don't limit yourself to the usual suspects. There are many types of berries you can try.

#### Some well-known berries include:

- Acai berries
- Strawberries
- Cranberries

#### Unusual berries you might want to try are:

- Huckleberries
- Elderberries
- Gooseberries
- Salmonberries

Adding a variety of healthy berries to your meals and snacks can ensure you are getting a variety of nutrients. Eat up!

What makes berries so healthy? Each type of berry has its own set of health benefits and choosing a variety can ensure you get the maximum amount of nutrition that you can!



**Strawberry**



**Acai Berry**



**Cranberry**



**Huckleberry**



**Elderberry**



**Gooseberry**



**Salmonberry**

## What are Berries Made of?

Berries have an impressive nutritional breakdown, which is why so many dietitians suggest eating them. Not only are they naturally sweet, but they are also a low-calorie food. Each one-cup serving of fresh berries has at most between 50-75 calories—that's all! What a great way to get that sweet taste you are craving without the extra calories. Compare that to a hot fudge sundae!



Berries are primarily a carbohydrate (*having around 10-15 grams per serving*), but they are also a high-fiber food. Did you know the American Heart Association recommends consuming 25-30 grams of fiber every day? Fiber can help keep you full, improve your blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and help with constipation. Many Americans fall short of this recommendation and only get around 10-15 grams each day. Adding berries can be a great way to increase the fiber content of your diet.

Check out how much fiber is in just one cup of the following berries:

- **Raspberries: 8 grams**
- **Strawberries: 3 grams**
- **Blueberries: 3.6 grams**
- **Blackberries: 8 grams**



Adding a cup (*or even two*) of berries to any meal or snack will get you well on your way to meeting your daily fiber goal.

## Add-up the Vitamins and Minerals

Berries are a great source of vitamins and minerals that keep your body going strong. Berries can be a great source of nutrients when they are added to a balanced diet. One serving of berries can't get you everything you need, but it can give you a great jump start!

### ● **Vitamin C:**

Vitamin C boots your immune system and can speed up healing. It can also help reduce hypertension and has been shown to fight free radicals. It is recommended adults take 65-95 milligrams of vitamin C every day, and berries can be a great source. In just one serving (*one cup*), strawberries have 85 milligrams and raspberries have 32 grams.



### ● **Potassium:**

Potassium has many functions in the body, including regulating blood pressure, decreasing muscle cramps, decreasing anxiety and improving brain health. It is suggested that adults get 3500-4700 milligrams of potassium each day. Berries can provide a good amount of this, but do not meet your needs entirely. The berries with the highest levels of potassium are: blackberries (*233 milligrams per cup*), raspberries (*186 milligrams per cup*) and strawberries (*220 milligrams per cup*).

### ● **Manganese:**

Berries can also be a good source of Manganese. What does manganese do? It is essential for metabolism, calcium absorption and blood sugar regulation. The recommended amount is 2.3 milligrams every day for adult men and 1.8 milligrams every day for adult women. Two berries that are high in manganese are strawberries (*0.6 milligrams per cup*) and blackberries (*0.45 milligrams per cup*).

### ● **Vitamin K:**

It is recommended that adults take in between 90-120 micrograms of vitamin K every day. Vitamin K is essential for blood clotting, regulating blood calcium levels and bone metabolism. Both blackberries (*29 micrograms per cup*) and blueberries (*28 micrograms per cup*) can be a good source of vitamin K.

## Antioxidants Improve Health

Berries are not only a source of vitamins, but they are also a good source of antioxidants. During cell production, free radicals are produced in your body. Antioxidants are in substances that slow down damage to your body's cells by reducing oxidative stress from these free radicals. By reducing this stress, the risk of developing diseases can decrease. Different types of berries contain a variety of antioxidants—all providing multiple health benefits to your body.

Blueberries specifically contain anthocyanin, an antioxidant that has shown to benefit the heart by improving blood flow and countering the buildup of plaque. Anthocyanin may help to reduce the risk of heart disease by reducing levels of LDL (*bad*) cholesterol and increasing HDL (*good*) cholesterol. This antioxidant has also been shown to improve blood glucose.

In general, berries provide a wide variety of health benefits. Strawberries contain vitamin C and anthocyanins, as well as polyphenols which help reduce inflammation in the body. In raspberries you will find the antioxidants anthocyanin and polyphenols that work against oxidative stress to reduce the risk of some cancers and tumor growth. Acai berries are one of the best sources of antioxidant polyphenols and may contain as much as ten times more antioxidants than blueberries.



We know that berries are a wonderful source of nutrition, but how do you fit them into your day? Here are some great ideas to get you started.

How can you make berries a part of every day?

- Pack them in your lunch box as a snack.
- Mix them in your oatmeal.
- Throw them on top of your salad.
- Create a fruit salad for dessert.
- Make a smoothie with low-fat yogurt and berries.
- Sprinkle them on top of your yogurt.
- Serve them as an after-school snack.

## Fun BERRY Recipes to Try this Spring



### Mixed Green Salad with BERRIES

Source: *TastesBetterFromScratch.com*

Below is a delicious salad with a mix of berries and vegetables. Turn this into a dinner option by adding chicken, shrimp or your favorite protein.

#### Salad Ingredients:

- 10 cups mixed greens lettuce (*red lettuce, romaine, spinach, or whatever you like*)
- ½ cup fresh strawberries, sliced
- ½ cup fresh blueberries
- ½ cup fresh raspberries
- ¼ cup red onion, diced
- 1 sweet apple, chopped
- 1 cup candied pecans
- ⅓ cup feta cheese crumbles

#### Creamy Poppy Seed Dressing Ingredients:

- 5.3 ounces strawberry yogurt
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 1 small piece red onion
- 2 tablespoons milk
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon poppy seeds



#### Directions:

1. Add all of the dressing ingredients to a blender and blend until smooth.
2. Taste. Add additional vinegar if you want it tangier, more sugar if you like it sweeter, or a dab more mayo and splash of milk if you want it creamier.
3. Stir in poppy seeds. Store dressing in the fridge for up to two weeks.
4. Make candied pecans.
5. Prepare, wash and dry berries and chop the apple and onion. Add greens to a large mixing bowl. Add toppings (*I like to set aside a spoonful of each topping to add at the end, for aesthetics*).
6. Toss the mixture in desired amount of dressing. Serve immediately.



## Triple Berry Smoothie

Source: *SkinnyTaste.com*

Looking for a quick after-school snack or breakfast on the way out the door? Try this recipe full of berries and a little bonus protein!

### Ingredients:

- ½ cup blackberries and raspberries
- 5 medium strawberries
- 1 cup crushed ice
- 6 ounces nonfat Greek yogurt
- A few drops of liquid stevia for sweetness  
(Recommend: NuNaturals)

### Directions:

- Place all ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.



## Honey Lime Berry Salad

Source: *TasteOfHome.com*

Looking for a side dish to bring to your next pitch-in dinner or make a batch to put in your children's lunch boxes this week? Try this berry-based salad.

### Ingredients:

- 4 cups fresh strawberries, halved
- 3 cups fresh blueberries
- 3 medium Granny Smith apples, cubed
- ⅓ cup lime juice
- ¼ to ⅓ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh mint

### Directions:

- In a large bowl, combine strawberries, blueberries and apples. In a small bowl, whisk lime juice, honey and mint. Pour over fruit; toss to coat.

## Conclusion

Here comes the fun part. Pick up a container of berries at your local market and enjoy. Berries are a great addition to any healthy diet, so choose them as often as you can this spring!

### About the Author:

*Sarah Muntel, RD, is a Registered Dietitian from Indianapolis, IN. She has worked in the field of bariatrics for the past 18 years. She has worked with both bariatric and metabolic surgery patients as well as medical weight-loss patients. Throughout her career, Sarah has worked in several bariatric centers in Indianapolis. She is currently the Bariatric Coordinator with Community Health Network. Sarah is an active member of the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), serves on the OAC Education Committee and frequently contributes to Weight Matters Magazine. She also plays an active role in the Indiana State Chapter of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS). In her free time, Sarah enjoys spending time with her husband and watching her three kids play sports.*



# ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



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## LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

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