The amazing blueberry

Blueberries are an amazing food—low in calories and rich in nutrients. They’re also effective at improving heart health. Research presented at the American Chemical Society’s national meeting in Philadelphia last August documented the cholesterol-fighting effects of pterostilbene, the active phytonutrient in blueberries.

This phytonutrient may have health effects similar to resveratrol, the antioxidant identified in grapes and red wine that is also believed to lower cholesterol.

“Other researchers have found pterostilbene in grapes, but this is the first time it has been found in blueberries,” says Agnes Rimando, PhD, a research chemist with the US Department of Agriculture.

She and her associates had earlier studied 10 species of native Vaccinium berry bushes and found resveratrol in both lowbush (Vaccinium angustifolium) and highbush (Vaccinium corymbosum) blueberries.

Now the discovery of the presence of pterostilbene makes blueberries an even better choice for those who need to lower cholesterol levels.

Rimando’s work involved laboratory studies that applied pterostilbene to rat liver cells to activate their peroxisome proliferator activated receptor (PPAR)alpha, which in turn plays a role in reducing cholesterol.

Until studies are conducted in humans, no one knows how many blueberries a person needs to eat to have a positive effect at lowering cholesterol, Rimando cautions. However, her study adds to a growing list of health benefits attributed to this fruit.

Camomile and summer colds

Does your granddad soothe you with a cup of camomile tea whenever you come down with a summer cold? Well, he’s doing the right thing.

A report published in a January 2005 issue of the American Chemical Society’s Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry confirms links between tea made with camomile (Matricaria recutita) and resistance to colds. In the study performed at Imperial College London, 14 study subjects (seven men and seven women) drank five cups of camomile tea every day for two weeks. At the end of the two-week period, urinary levels of hippurate were found to have increased significantly. Hippurate is known to help the body fight off colds.

Urine tests also showed higher levels of glycine, an amino acid that can ease muscle spasms, including menstrual cramps.

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