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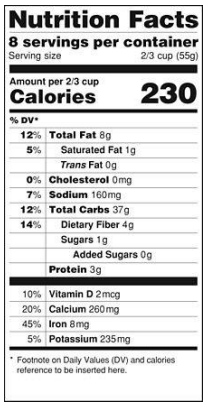
STRAIGHT TALK ON SUGAR AND CRANBERRIES: FAQ WITH JULIE MILLER JONES, PHD, CNS, LN

Current dietary recommendations call to limit added sugars to less than 10 percent of calories per day to meet nutrient needs within calorie limits. But is that the whole story? What about nutrient dense foods that are sweetened for palatability? And why is it important to consider this when it comes to cranberries? To better understand the complexities of the added sugar debate and the added benefits of cranberries, the following FAQs are answered by the world-renowned nutrition expert, **Julie Miller Jones, PhD, CNS, LN.**

WHAT ARE ADDED SUGARS?

Dr. Jones: Added sugars are any sugars that are added to foods during processing or preparation. While many foods have naturally occurring sugar, like the fructose in fruit, added sugars are in addition to what is naturally found in foods. Added sugars come in many forms. Names for added sugars include: brown sugar, corn sweetener, corn syrup, dextrose, fructose, fruit juice concentrates, glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, honey, invert sugar, lactose, maple syrup, birch syrup, agave syrup, maltose, malt sugar, molasses, raw sugar, turbinado sugar, trehalose and sucrose (table sugar).[1]

IN MAY 2016, THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION (FDA) ANNOUNCED THAT UPDATES TO THE NUTRITION FACTS PANEL WOULD INCLUDE THE GRAMS OF ADDED SUGARS, ALONG WITH THE PERCENT DAILY VALUE (%DV). *WHY?*



Nutrition Facts

8 servings per container

Serving size 2/3 cup (55g)

Amount per 2/3 cup

Calories 230

% DV*	
12%	**Total Fat** 8g
5%	Saturated Fat 1g
	Trans Fat 0g
0%	**Cholesterol** 0mg
7%	**Sodium** 160mg
12%	**Total Carbs** 37g
14%	Dietary Fiber 4g
	Sugars 1g
	Added Sugars 0g
	Protein 3g
10%	**Vitamin D** 2mcg
20%	**Calcium** 260mg
45%	**Iron** 8mg
5%	**Potassium** 235mg

* Footnote on Daily Values (DV) and calories reference to be inserted here.

Dr. Jones: The decision to include added sugars information is based, in part, on the conclusions of the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which note that it's difficult to meet nutrient needs while staying within calorie limits if more than 10 percent of total daily calories from added sugars is consumed.[1,2] Some believe that listing added sugars on the Nutrition Facts Panel will help people make more informed decisions to better achieve nutritional goals.

WHAT ABOUT NUTRIENT-RICH FOODS THAT HAVE ADDED SUGARS – LIKE FRUITS SUCH AS CRANBERRIES, FLAVORED MILKS AND YOGURTS, AND BRAN AND WHOLE GRAINS CEREALS AND BREAD – SHOULD THEY BE AVOIDED?

Dr. Jones: Some foods with added sugars are nutrient dense and offer health benefits. Recognizing this, the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans states that there is room in healthy eating plans to include limited amounts of added sugars to improve the palatability of naturally tart, nutrient dense foods, such as cranberries or rhubarb.[2]

Fixation on a singular dietary component or nutrient can mistakenly lead to misapplication of dietary advice and a decrease in nutrient intake. For example, research has shown that when chocolate milk was removed from school lunches because of its added sugar content, the intake of milk decreased along with that of calcium, an essential nutrient commonly under consumed.[3] This underscores the need to balance intake of added sugars with overall nutrient intake and diet quality.

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WHY IS SUGAR ADDED TO FOODS?

Dr. Jones: Flavor! Sugars add flavor. They may actually decrease bitterness or acidity making nutritious foods more desirable, especially to children. Thus, in such cases, added sugar can help increase the consumption of foods with high nutrient content. Added sugars may have many other jobs as well. They often add bulk or body, improve texture, help maintain color or assist in fermentation and preservation.[4]

CAN FOODS WITH "ADDED SUGARS" FIT IN A HEALTHY DIET?

Dr. Jones: Yes. Added sugars encourage selection of nutrient rich foods, such as cranberry products, flavored milks and dairy, and high-fiber whole grain foods. These foods offer high-quality nutrients and important phytochemicals that improve diet quality and shouldn't be mistakenly avoided because of added sugars labeling. Consider all the information on the Nutrition Facts Panel, beyond added sugars, to ensure that all dietary goals are being met.

WHEN IT COMES TO CRANBERRIES, WHY ARE THEY SWEETENED?

Dr. Jones: Cranberry products are usually sweetened because, unlike other berries, cranberries are naturally low in sugar and high in acidity, so they require sweetening to be palatable. But, when it comes to dried cranberries, the total amount of sugar is equal to that of other dried fruits, like raisins or dried cherries.

WHY IS THERE AN EXCEPTION FOR SWEETENED CRANBERRIES IN THE 2015-2020 DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS?

Dr. Jones: The 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend choosing foods in nutrient dense forms that contain essential vitamins and minerals, dietary fiber and other naturally occurring compounds that may have positive health effects.[2] Recognizing this, the Guidelines stated that there is room in healthy eating plans to include limited amounts of added sugars to improve the palatability of naturally tart, nutrient dense foods, such as cranberries.[2]

DO OTHER EXPERTS AGREE THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN EXCEPTION FOR CRANBERRIES?

Dr. Jones: Yes, the FDA has acknowledged that nutrient dense foods may have added sugars. In the FDA, Federal Register, Vol. 49, March 3, 2014, it stated, "We recognize that small amounts of added sugars can increase the palatability of nutrient-dense foods." Similarly, the USDA's Interim Final Rule for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program: Nutrition Standards for All Foods Sold in School as Required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 stated, "We support an exemption for dried fruits with added nutritive sweeteners when the added sweeteners are required for the processing or palatability of the product, such as dried cranberries, tart cherries or blueberries."

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WHAT ARE THE ADDED HEALTH BENEFITS OF CRANBERRIES?

Dr. Jones: More than 500 original research and review articles about cranberries (including sugar-sweetened cranberry products) have been published in peer-reviewed medical and nutrition journals. The current evidence, along with a comprehensive review of *Cranberries and Their Bioactive Constituents in Human Health* in the November 2013 issue of *Advances in Nutrition*, reveals that with or without added sugars:

Cranberries are a rich source of dietary phenolic bioactives. of cranberries' health benefits are attributed to this polyphenol content.[5,6] These naturally occurring compounds have been associated in vitro and in vivo with antibacterial, antiviral, antimicrobial, anticarcinogenic, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties.[7] There is a substantial and growing body of research that suggests polyphenols, like those found in cranberries, exert protective benefits for cardiovascular disease, related risk factors and other chronic conditions.

Cranberries contain the flavanol, proanthocyanidin (PAC). The unusual A-type structure of the cranberry PAC appears to be responsible for the anti-adhesive properties not found in other PAC-containing fruits and vegetables.[8] PACs have been shown to prevent the adhesion of bacteria to cells, thus interfering with the ability of some bacteria to cause infections in the urinary tract[9-17] and the gastrointestinal system (including the mouth and stomach).[19,20]

Although most human studies have focused on cranberry's beneficial effect on urinary tract health, there is novel research suggesting positive effects on oral health,[19] cardiovascular disease,[4] cancer prevention,[20,23] glycemic response,[7,24,25] and in treating or preventing infections such by Helicobacter pylori (*H. pylori*) bacteria, a cause of gastritis and peptic ulcer disease.[19,26-29]

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