



MEDICAL MINUTE

CRANBERRIES

Love them or hate them, cranberries show up at our Thanksgiving feast like that relative nobody invited but nobody dares uninvite. Then comes the great debate: jellied or sauce? I'm not picking a side (jellied, with the can ridges intact, thank you), but I want everyone to know cranberries are healthy and tasty, and not just a red decoration that jiggles.

Cranberries are native to North America, and fall is the best time to buy them fresh. Don't worry about buying them too early, because they're the one thing in my kitchen that doesn't go bad. Tightly sealed in a plastic bag, they last up to 2 months, and cooked, they last a month in a sealed container. That's a longer commitment than most of my relationships with produce.

So, what can cranberries do for you, health-wise?? A lot!! Hold onto your stretchy pants.

Everyone knows they help prevent urinary tract infections. Why? Cranberries help stop certain bacteria from sticking to the urinary tract and bladder walls. Sorry, Ocean Spray, but juice doesn't have enough antioxidants to do the trick. The good news is that capsules do. Talk about clingy, though: cranberries also keep bacteria from binding to your teeth and may help prevent gum disease. Finally, something that says "get off my property" to bacteria.

Now let's talk cardiovascular. Cranberries prevent platelet buildup and reduce blood pressure, and they might even lower cholesterol. For your gut, the fiber promotes gut health and feeds the beneficial bacteria, so your insides can finally throw a nice party. In general, cranberries fight inflammation and support the immune system. Not bad for something that looks like a tiny red bouncy ball.

Vitamin C is a main antioxidant in cranberries, and it's essential for maintaining your bones, skin, and muscles. Translation: it keeps the parts of you that hold you together, well, together. And there are plenty of other vitamins and minerals in there, too. Who knew a berry could be such an overachiever?

Cranberries might be small, but they are mighty. It wouldn't be Thanksgiving without them, and who knew they were such a powerful health source? Now if someone could just find a health benefit for the pumpkin pie and whip cream, I'd be all set.

