



## Freelance Article

### **Blueberries: a good bet for improved health**

Many people would not associate the world of high stakes poker with healthy eating, but for the big winner in the 2006 World Series of Poker, a nutritious snack made all the difference. Jamie Gold gives part of the credit for his \$12 million in winnings to blueberries, a fruit he refers to as “brain food.”

Long known only as an ingredient in muffins or pies, blueberries have, in the past few years, gained a new claim to fame. It turns out these little blue fruits are nutritional powerhouses. Their numerous health benefits have earned them a place atop many nutritionists’ lists of must-eat foods.

### **Antioxidants in Blueberries**

Since about 2004, the word has been out that blueberries have high levels of antioxidants. Why is this important? The benefits of antioxidants are tied up in a complex chemical process in the body involving oxygen and free radicals, but the basic point is this: free radicals are bad and antioxidants neutralize their ill effects. And make no mistake, if free radicals are left unchecked they can lead to serious disease. Research is ongoing, but it is increasingly showing that antioxidants can combat certain cancers and neurodegenerative diseases, like Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s. And blueberries have been shown to contain the highest levels of antioxidants in any fruit.

So, what gives blueberries the edge over other fruit? Well, the fact that they’re blue, for one thing. Their rich purple-blue colour comes from the antioxidant anthocyanin, which is also the source of many of their health benefits. Preliminary research has shown that anthocyanin not only helps in disease prevention, as outlined earlier, but also improves eyesight. And blueberries contain yet another type of antioxidant, called stilbenes, which have been shown to lower cholesterol.

And what of Jamie Gold’s claim that blueberries are brain food? It’s those antioxidants again. The same properties that may prevent Alzheimer’s also work to protect the brain from various other stresses, and may influence the way brain cells communicate with each other.

### **Other Health Benefits of Blueberries**

Blueberries have been shown effective in preventing and treating common ailments, like urinary tract infections and childhood diarrhea. Treatment of the latter comes from substances called anthocyanosides which appear to have antibacterial properties. And initial research is showing that the presence of ellagic acid in blueberries may inhibit the growth of cancer.

Like all berries, blueberries are also very high in fibre and vitamins, like C and E. And if you are watching your weight, blueberries are the ideal treat: they satisfy your cravings for sweets without fat and with almost no calories.

### **Get Your Daily Dose of Blueberries**

According to the North American Blueberry Council, consumers claim that blueberries are easy-to-use and versatile. And they are right. The nutritional benefits are present whether the berries are fresh, frozen or dried, so there are many fast and easy ways to add them to your diet.

Start your day with fresh or dried blueberries in your cereal. Fresh or frozen blueberries are a great addition to a fruit shake – just blend together some blueberries, milk, a banana and a bit of molasses and you have a healthy and filling breakfast drink. Toss some fresh blueberries in a container and keep them at your desk for snacks. Or, mix some fresh or frozen blueberries with yogurt for dessert. And you can always fall back on the classics (although not too often if you want to stay slim): blueberry pie or cobbler.