

Health Benefits of Balsamic Vinegar

Can Pouring On The Salad Dressing Reduce Your Risk of Heart Attacks?

Researchers at Harvard think so. According to a recent study, salad dressings may protect against fatal heart attacks. The scientists found that salad dressings, especially oil and vinegar varieties, contain alpha linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid, that has protective effects against heart disease.

"Higher consumption of foods such as oil-based salad dressings that provide polyunsaturated fats, including alpha linolenic acid, may reduce the risk of fatal IHD (ischemic heart disease)," the researchers wrote in a study published in the May issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. A higher intake of oil and vinegar salad dressings, an important source of alpha linolenic acid, was associated with reduced risk of fatal IHD when women who consumed this food more than five to six times a week were compared with those who rarely consumed this food, according to the researchers, led by Dr. Frank B. Hu, a research associate at the Harvard School of Public Health.

"Women who consumed one to two tablespoons of vinaigrette almost every day had about a 50 percent reduction in heart disease," Dr. Hu said. Warning: Don't pour on the creamy ranch or gorgonzola dressing, they probably have the opposite effect as they are high in saturated fats.

The intake of alpha linolenic was derived from a 116-item food-frequency questionnaire completed in 1984 by 76,283 women without previously diagnosed cancer or cardiovascular disease. The primary fatty acids in olive oil are oleic, linoleic and linolenic acid. Oleic acid is monosaturated and makes up 55-85% of olive oil. Linoleic is polyunsaturated and makes up about 9%. Linolenic, which is polyunsaturated, makes up 0-1.5%.

"In conclusion, this study provides support for the hypothesis that a higher intake of alpha linolenic acid will reduce the risk of fatal IHD," the researchers noted. "Our findings suggest that a reduction in the consumption of foods such as oil-based salad dressings that contain polyunsaturated fats, including alpha linolenic acid, may increase the risk of fatal IHD."

BALSAMIC VINEGAR

From Ancient Folk Medicine to Modern Miracle

Vinegar has been used since ancient times as a zesty seasoning and a healthy tonic to relieve fatigue, help digestion and aid in weight loss.

Here are just a few more benefits

- High in cancer-fighting antioxidants
- A natural appetite suppressant
- Reduces cholesterol to prevent heart disease
- Helps retard osteoporosis
- Amino acids slow the effects of aging
- Reduces the severity and frequency of headaches
- Enzymes for digestive disorders and poor metabolism
- Minerals to prevent bone diseases such as osteoporosis, prevent strokes, treat anemia and fatigue, as well as lower high blood pressure and high cholesterol

Balsamics are a study in balance and contrast. Sweet and sharp. Spicy and mellow. The process begins with gently crushing the wine grapes and concentrating their juice over an open flame. Then the sweet thick grape "must" is fermented once by yeast to make alcohol. Then fermented again by the "madre" culture to make the smooth and subtle sourness for which Balsamics are known.

The process of becoming vinegar occurs in wooden barrels. As the volume decreases through evaporation over the years the maturing liquor is transferred to smaller and smaller casks, each with its special blend of aromatic flavoring woods. The filled barrels are placed in the attic for ideal temperatures, hot in Summer, cold in Winter. Over years of aging, the fruit and spice and mood of the finest Balsamic emerges.

Grapes a Cancer Fighting Food

Red grapes like those used in making balsamic vinegar, contain a bioflavonoid known as quercetin. This works as an antioxidant and operates with Vitamin C to stimulate the immune system to fight infection, cancer, and inflammation.

The seeds in grapes contain a substance called pyenogenols. This substance has a high degree of antioxidant and fights arthritis, cardiovascular problems, stress, and allergies.

The resveratrol in grapes has been the aim of recent research. The University of Illinois says it slows down or stops the growth of tumors. Studies show it inhibits tumor growth at the initiation, promotion, and progression stages.

France's Liver Research Study Group says resveratrol helps prevent liver cancer by blocking the invasion of tumor cells. Science laboratories report findings that it stops the development of an enzyme linked to breast cancer.

The University of Wisconsin's research shows that flavonoids in purple grape juice prevent the thickening of the arteries that hinder the flow of blood to the heart. Research continues to study the properties of grapes in the nation's fight against cancer and heart disease.

The Truth About Fat

"The problem is that 'total fat' is not a useful term. There are good fats and bad fats. In the public's mind, fat has become public enemy number one. Reducing dietary fat has become a priority. But the truth is that if you reduce your total fat consumption, you're also reducing the amount of good fats that you eat -- fats that have a protective effect against heart disease."

Some fats are good because they can improve blood cholesterol levels.

When we talk about fatty acids there are two considerations. The first is whether it is essential for life, one of the "essential fatty acids". The second consideration is whether it may prevent disease and prolong life. Omega-3 fatty acids have been in the spotlight recently because they may help prevent stroke and heart attacks.

The FDA has said "Consumption of omega-3 fatty acids may reduce the risk of coronary heart disease" (2/2002), and the American Heart Association AHA states: "We recommend eating fish two times per week." Omega-3s exert their health benefits by blocking inflammatory substances made by the body and disrupting the function of platelets, a part of the blood clotting machinery.