

Powerful Pomegranates

Jewels of goodness

By Kirsty Baxter

Natural antioxidants to boost your microbiota!

Summer has arrived, allowing many to get back to their preferred exercise regime. While some have been training all winter for the Sky Run, others are out walking, practicing Pilates or connecting with Yoga. Whatever your exercise preference may be, I hope you are moving in some way, shape or form!

Regardless of your preferred physical activity, exercise fundamentally places stress on the body. What we eat and drink after exercise can help our body recover from these stresses. This can be especially important as you get your exercise routine back on track!

We often think about carbs and protein after exercise; however, antioxidants should also be considered as an essential part of your post-exercise recovery. More importantly, research has shown that the best results come from using antioxidant-rich whole foods before supplements.

There are a number of nutrient-rich plants, herbs, and spices that are great sources of antioxidants so let's embrace some of those that are found locally to bump up the antioxidant content of your meals, snacks, and drinks.

I give you, the delicious Pomegranate

With a worldwide number of growing consumer demand for healthier food products, the scientific community has made a considerable effort to thoroughly investigate the beneficial health effects of pomegranate consumption in the last two decades.

The consumption of pomegranate juices and extracts has long been linked to many health benefits beyond nutrition. For those who like the technical jargon, pomegranate is an excellent source of dietary fibre and health-benefiting nutrients, including Vitamins (i.e., Vitamin C, A, folic acid) and minerals (such as potassium). It is also a rich source of phenolic compounds and some alkaloids, triterpenes, and sterols. Pomegranates are also rich in unsaturated fatty acids like the omega 5 punicic acid that constitutes around 70% of pomegranate seed oil. These compounds have been suggested to exert numerous beneficial health activities, beyond their nutritional properties, and are the basis for considering the pomegranate as a possible functional food.

The pomegranate seed oil has Phyto-Estrogenic compounds, which are estrogen-like compounds derived from plants that have health benefits. As a fruit, pomegranates are rich in phenolic compounds with strong antioxidant activity. Since ancient times, the juice and seeds had been considered the best therapy for throat and heart disorders. Ellagic acid is one of the main components of pomegranate with a potent antioxidant activity.

Prebiotic effect

New insights about our gut microbiota have revealed functions beyond the well-described nutritive and defensive activities, which has led the scientific community to consider it as a virtual organ as foundational to our health or disease. Increasing evidence puts forward gut microbiota as an exciting target in the prevention of chronic diseases, including intestinal (diarrhea, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease) and metabolic disorders (i.e., obesity and diabetes), non-alcoholic hepatic steatosis, food intolerances, allergies, asthma, cancer and neurodegenerative diseases.

Lifestyle is one of the factors that exert a more significant influence on gut microbiota. Thus, a healthy lifestyle inexorably implies a healthy diet, which is essential in improving intestinal health and the proper balance of the gut microbiota. Westernized diets are high in processed foods, high in fat and sugar, and low in fibre as well as plant-derived food (such as fruits and vegetables). Other typical factors that can disrupt the intestinal microbiome is the excessive consumption of antibiotics and pain medication, high stress levels, and (or) intestinal related disorders, including celiac disease. This disruption, known as intestinal dysbiosis, is characterized by an alteration of the ratio of harmful, to beneficial bacteria, favouring the growth of microorganisms associated with undesirable effects to the host. Fibre and polyphenols provided by fruits and vegetables play a positive role in the composition and functionality of the gut microbiota, contributing to maintaining its homeostasis. In this regard, the high content in fibre and polyphenols of the pomegranate is a beneficial factor in modulating the gut microbiota.

In conclusion, the studies described above suggest that consumption of pomegranates within healthy balanced diet could exert beneficial effects via modulation of gut microbiota, which may help prevent chronic diseases.

How can I use pomegranates in daily nutrition?

- Extract the pips and sprinkle a handful over your salad
- Extract the juice and use it as a naturally sweetened salad dressing, adding olive oil and balsamic or lemon juice
- Extract the juice, add to your fav smoothie or green juice



EASY SUMMER SALAD

Ingredients:

- 1,5 cups quinoa
- 1 cucumber
- Handful of chopped green beans
- 1/2 pomegranate seeds
- 1/2 butternut chopped into small pieces
- Fresh mint, finely chopped
- Lemon Juice

Crunchy chickpeas:

- 1 can chickpeas, rinsed
- Cumin
- Paprika

- Garlic powder [or fresh garlic]
- Salt, Pepper, Olive oil spray

Method:

Rinse chickpeas and lay them flat on a baking or air fryer tray. Dress the chickpeas with cumin, paprika, salt, olive oil and garlic powder and cook for half an hour or until crunchy. Dress pumpkin in the same spices as chickpeas. Roast in oven or air fryer until golden brown. In a bowl combine quinoa, cucumber, roasted pumpkin, pomegranate seeds, mint and beans. Top with crunchy chickpeas and lemon juice. To store this salad, keep the chickpeas in an air-tight container in the pantry until needed.