

Your Health

An Apple A Day Could Keep Colon Cancer Away

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An apple *skin* a day could keep colon cancer away, and a common gout drug might also help, two new studies claim.

The findings about the drug allopurinol are too preliminary to be applied to patients. But the apple advice, gleaned from laboratory tests, is ready for prime time because the fruits are already considered part of a healthy diet.

"This is one more piece of evidence showing that whole foods--especially the skin of an apple--have benefits in preventing cancer," said **Dr. Steve Pratt**, author of *SuperFoods Rx: Fourteen Foods That Will Change Your Life*.

French researchers studied the health benefits of several kinds of apple-based antioxidants by exposing cancer cells to them. They tested the cells to see if the antioxidants, known as polyphenols, cut down on tumor growth.

Antioxidants, which target the oxidation of cells, appear to be a potent cancer fighter.

Indeed, procyanidins, one type of polyphenol in the apples, turned out to impede cancer growth. In another test, rats fed a mixture of water and apple-derived procyanidins were half as likely to develop precancerous lesions after being exposed to a carcinogen that causes colon cancer.

Since procyanidins are found in apple skins, "our work suggest that eating the whole apple, including the skin, might offer some anticancer benefits," lead investigator **Francis Raul**, research director of the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research, said in a statement. "That is certainly something we can comfortably do without further study."

In an interview, Raul added that apple cider, which is mulled from whole apples, may be an especially handy way to add procyanidins to a diet.

Pratt, who studies nutrition while working as an eye doctor at Scripps Memorial Hospital in San Diego, said the procyanidins in apple skins may have gained their cancer-fighting powers by protecting the fruits against the damaging effects of sunlight.

"The synergy of multiple kinds of fruits and vegetables together will prevent cancer," he said. "But an apple is an easy thing to bring in a lunch, easy to buy. The skin of an apple is your buddy."

In other colon cancer news, Israeli and American researchers report on the possible positive effects of the gout drug allopurinol.

The risk of colorectal cancer dropped by two-thirds among 1,781 people, average age 70, who took the drug for at least five years.

It's not clear how allopurinol might prevent colorectal cancer, but researchers suspect its antioxidant properties--like those found in apple skins--could explain its apparent powers. The drug targets the buildup of uric acid, which contributes to gout, a painful inflammatory disease that causes a condition similar to arthritis.

"We have no knowledge about what this drug could do to healthy people without elevated uric acid, but it's been in use for many years," said **Dr. Gad Rennert**, director of Israel's CHS National Cancer Control Center and Technion Public Health Forum. "The number of people who have used it is very high and I can't recall any major side effect."

The study was limited and only showed a connection between use of the drug and lower colorectal cancer rates, not a direct cause-and-effect relationship, Rennert said. "It only raises the suggestion that this is an interesting alley to investigate further. But it looks pretty promising."

Both colon cancer studies were presented Oct. 18 at the American Association for Cancer Research meeting in Seattle.



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