



THE ALASKA CLUB

Figs!

An ancient fruit with stunning health properties, figs pack a mighty nutritional wallop. Sweet, satisfying and hard working, they help protect against disease and may even play a role in weight control.

It's not enough to be Cleopatra's favorite fruit. It hardly matters that figs—a staple of the ancient Greeks who, by the way, enjoyed remarkably good health—have the distinction of being one of the oldest cultivated plants in history.

None of these facts mean much to today's savvy consumers—we're more preoccupied with nutritional value than pedigree. As far as health benefits, figs are sure to satisfy the most discriminating palate—containing as they do an impressive array of dietary components surpassing that of most common fruits.

Cleopatra's cravings aside, what really matters is that figs have zero fat, no sodium and are cholesterol free. Figs are exceptionally high in dietary fiber, which provides a host of health benefits.

Good as they are fresh, figs are even better dried.



The results of a study comparing the nutritional content of a variety of fruits weighed heavily in favor of figs.

"On the fresh side for nutrient score, figs were number three," reports Dr. Joe Vinson, professor of chemistry at the University of Scranton, in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

"On the dried side, in terms of energy, fiber, calcium, iron, and potassium, they tied for first place with apricots. When people ask me what's the active ingredient in figs, I say everything. You need it all."

More specifically we all require antioxidants to protect the body against cellular damage caused by free radicals, the unstable molecules arising from metabolic processes and environmental factors such as pollution.

Testing by Dr. Vinson leaves no doubt as to the effectiveness of figs in mitigating free radical damage. Antioxidants were found in the blood of test subjects who consumed figs, improving their ability to combat the oxidative stress caused by eating fats and sugars.

"All plant foods have antioxidants," says Dr. Vinson, "and in rather high levels because the plant is exposed to ultraviolet light and it needs protection. So plants are like antioxidant factories. Antioxidants are in the leaves, stem and fruit. The real value of fruit is found not so much in terms of vitamins, but antioxidants."

Figs are a soft fruit, vulnerable to spoilage. They're generally available only in dried form yet retain significant amounts of nutrients even after processing. According to Dr. Vinson, a 100-gram serving of dried figs contains 20 per cent of the daily value of fiber.

Among common fruits, dried figs rate second only to oranges in terms of calcium.

They also contain unusually high levels of iron and potassium.

"Figs, as both a fruit and a snack," writes Vinson, "are an ideal addition to a child's diet and an adult's because they represent an excellent source of fiber and are naturally sweet."

It Figures

Figs are much more than a tasty treat; they appear to have numerous medicinal properties crucial to the maintenance of good health. See what they may do for you:

- **Limit Weight Gain.** The dietary fiber in figs has proven beneficial in weight loss trials involving obese women.
- **Improve Bone Density.** Calcium plays an integral role in bone formation, and figs boast one of the highest levels of this essential mineral.
- **Help Prevent Cancer.** Figs feature a number of anti-cancer compounds, namely benzaldehyde and coumarins. Both have been used successfully in the treatment of various forms of cancer.
- **Reduce the Risk of Heart Disease.** The polyphenols found in all fruit and vegetables promote good vascular health. Figs have a high concentration of polyphenols, greater than found in red wine.

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