

Cranberry For Urinary Tract Infection: an Alternative to Prescription Drugs

Cranberry juice is a common home remedy for urinary tract infections, but it is only recently that the way in which it works is beginning to be understood. Cranberry grows in acidic wetlands throughout the Northern hemisphere, including Canada and the Northern parts of the USA. The main areas of cultivation in the USA are Wisconsin and Massachusetts. It is used as a juice, sauce and dried and is one of what are classed as 'superfoods' for its antioxidant properties.

Early Europeans and Americans used it topically to treat infections and wounds, and it was also used in the treatment of scurvy. The effectiveness of Vitamin C was known at that time, and cranberries are now known to possess large quantities of Vitamin C which is also a powerful antioxidant with a beneficial effect on the heart.

However, it is in its effect on urinary tract infections that cranberry is currently under major investigation, and a 2001 study in Finland strongly supported this. Urinary tract infections (UTI) such as cystitis are extremely painful, with a sometimes severe burning sensation when you urinate and pain in the lower back and abdomen. Normally you will urinate frequently in small amounts, and there is no relief from the pain and discomfort. It is one of the most common bacterial infections in the USA and Europe, and is generally treated with antibiotics.

Up to 60% of women contract a UTI and of these 30% will contract it twice. A total of 5% - 6% of women will have it three times or more in their lifetime, and seven million women annually will visit a doctor with the problem. It is world wide problem that cause great expense to industry and to health authorities, let alone the pain and misery it causes to the patients.

However, there is a growing problem with antibiotics in that their continued use is creating a natural resistance of many bacteria to them and researches have been seeking alternatives to antibiotics for the more common infections. Cranberry is known for its antibacterial properties, and it has recently been established that it may be capable of curing this particular infection. Not only that, but a regular intake of cranberry juice could prevent its recurrence.

The urinary tract infections caused by the bacterium *Escherichia coli* (commonly E Coli) are cystitis and pyelonephritis. The former is an infection of the bladder and pyelonephritis is a kidney infection caused by the migration of the E coli to the kidneys. The bacteria normally live in the colon. There is another, urethritis, which is an infection of the urethra that runs from the bladder out, but this is a normally a viral infection and so not affected by antibiotics, natural or synthetic.

Studies have shown that cranberry (*Vaccinium* in four different species) contains a glycoprotein that can prevent E. coli from attaching to the bladder wall and so causing it to be flushed out of the system, and thus preventing infection. Tests amongst women with a history of repeated infections with cystitis have indicated that regular taking of cranberry juice reduced the frequency and number of incidences.

Women are more prone than men to this condition because while in the male the urethra is about 10 inches in length, and not straight, in women it is around only 2 inches and straight. Bacteria therefore find it easy to move up the female urethra into the bladder. This is exacerbated by tight clothing and intercourse, making it easier for women to contract the infection. Women also have frequent recurrences since the bladder lining is injured by the initial infection, and is therefore weakened and more susceptible to further attack.

Not all E. coli strains cause urinary tract infections, but those that do are common. At one time it was thought to be the acidity of the cranberry juice that was the reason for its effect, and the reduction in pH of the urine, but that is now known not to be the case. For the infection to proceed, it is necessary for the bacteria to bind to the bladder wall early on in the infection, otherwise they are flushed out. Cranberries contain chemicals known as proanthocyanidins that inhibit this process, fructose, and mannose that is also believed to have an effect.

Because cranberry has an effect on the adhesion of E. coli to the uroepithelial cells of the bladder, it is thought that it might also have an effect on the adhesion of *Helicobacter pylori* to the cell lining of the stomach. This bacterium cause conditions such as stomach ulcers and gastritis. There is evidence that this is so and investigations are continuing. There is also evidence that cranberry juice has a mitigating effect on the formation of bacterial aggregates in the mouth, and its use as an oral mouthwash is being investigated.

The most widely used method of distribution of cranberry is in the form of the juice, although there are other cranberry products available. It is also taken in the form of a powder in capsule form. Many physicians treat urinary tract infections with antibiotics to remove the bacteria and then with cranberry capsules over a period time until the damage done to the balder and urinary tract has been repaired. The cranberry capsules prevent reinfection during this critical period when the body is most at risk of further attack by the E. coli.

The juice is also thought to contain antioxidant properties and to be an effective aid to the immune system and in the prevention of some cancers. However, these claims have yet to be established with clinical testing. It has also been seen to prevent dental plaque and to be effective in preventing the formation of kidney stones.

People taking warfarin should avoid cranberry, and it should be taken only at the recommended dose since an excessive dose can cause gastric problems and diarrhea. Otherwise cranberry is safe to take with no other known side effects. It is stressed, however, that anybody with a urinary tract infection should consult their doctor and not try to treat it themselves with cranberry juice or capsules since the main benefit of cranberry seems to be in the prevention of infection rather than its treatment.

About the Author

More information is available at <http://vitanetonline.com/> where name brand [cranberry](#) and cranberry extract supplements can be found.

Source: <http://www.healthcrazed.com>