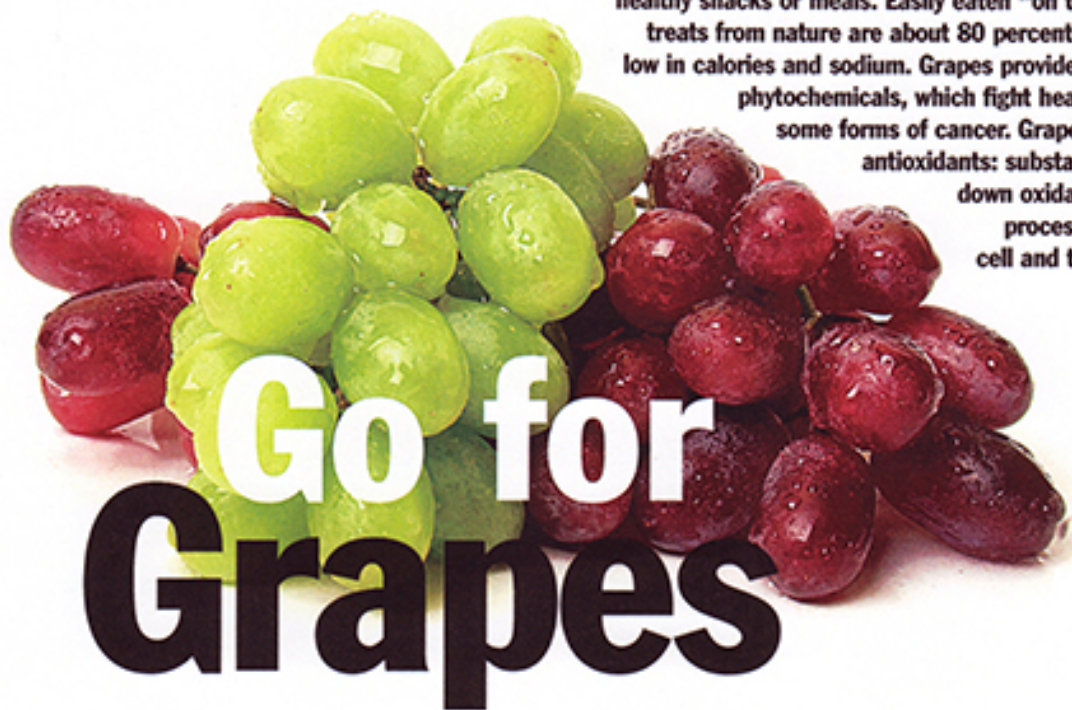


Grapes are one of the most popular fruits in the United States. Whether sweet, crisp or tart, they offer endless possibilities for healthy snacks or meals. Easily eaten "on the run," these treats from nature are about 80 percent water and are low in calories and sodium. Grapes provide the body with phytochemicals, which fight heart disease and some forms of cancer. Grapes also provide antioxidants: substances that slow down oxidation, a natural process that leads to cell and tissue damage.



How to Select and Store

With thousands of varieties from which to choose, grapes can be found in a rainbow of colors. Green grapes should have a yellowish hue, while red, purple, blue and black grapes should be deep and rich in color. Look for grapes that are plump and firmly attached to healthy-looking stems.

If you're not going to serve the whole bunch at one time, use scissors to separate small clusters from the stem instead of removing the individual grapes. Loosely wrap unwashed grapes in a paper towel and refrigerate them in a plastic bag. They will stay fresh for two or three days.

Just before eating, wash grapes under cold running water, then drain them in a colander or gently pat them dry.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas

Serve grapes with low-fat cheese and whole-grain crackers.

Add grapes to lemonade for a refreshing drink.

Add seedless, chilled grapes to chicken, pasta or seafood salads.

Make fruit kabobs by threading grapes and other fresh fruits onto four-inch bamboo skewers.

Little-Known Facts

Nations have been growing grapes for more than 8,000 years, making it one of the oldest cultivated fruits. There are more grapes grown around the world than any other fruit, with Italy being the number-one producer of table grapes (the kind you eat), followed by Chile and the United States, mainly California.

You may have heard reports that red wine lowers the risk of heart disease. This may be because grape skins contain a substance thought to prevent fats from clogging blood vessels. Because your health professional may recommend you limit or avoid alcohol, you can choose 100 percent grape juice made with the skins, or simply eat grapes fresh from the vine.

Grapes are a good source of vitamin C, an antioxidant that provides essential health benefits for your body. Vitamin C keeps your skin, gums, teeth and bones healthy. Also, it improves iron absorption, aids in healing and reduces inflammation and damage caused by toxins such as cigarette smoke. Grapes offer an abundance of health benefits.

Nutritional Facts

A serving of 12 large grapes or 17 small grapes has:

About 60 calories

Zero grams of fat

Nearly 25 percent of your daily value of vitamin C

At least 1 gram of fiber