

The Pomegranate Fruit

By D. Milton Stokes, RD

QUESTION: I've seen pomegranate juice in my grocery store. Is it particularly good for you? What does it taste like?

ANSWER: Packed with health benefits, pomegranate fruits are only available in the fall and winter. Recently, though, the juice, which comes from the fruit's seeds, has become widely available year-round.

Pomegranate juice tastes a bit like grape juice, and it seems to offer more disease-fighting antioxidants than any juice, including grape.

The pomegranate has been widely used and studied. According to a literature review published in the *British Medical Journal*, the Greek physician Dioscorides recommended pomegranate for gastric and oral health. In more recent times, researchers found that drinking 8 ounces of pomegranate juice a day may somewhat reduce blood pressure. Lowering this risk factor may improve your overall cardiovascular health, staving off heart attack and stroke.

The pomegranate also boasts an abundance of flavonoids and other antioxidants — those little chemicals that may help prevent numerous diseases and health conditions, such as cancer and heart disease. (See this issue's



A pomegranate and its seeds, courtesy POM Wonderful, www.pomwonderful.com

tea article for more on flavonoids.) Pomegranate is also a good source of potassium.

Besides health implications, the pomegranate has made quite a flourish in the art world. Ancient Egyptians fashioned sculptures with pomegranates while artists depicted them on the canvas and in fabrics. And even England's queen Catherine of Aragon made a place for this vibrant fruit on her insignia.

Whether the subject of exquisite art, royal insignia, or diet and health, pomegranate has been around for ages, and the deliciousness imparted by its kernels ensures it will remain a permanent fixture in our diets for some time to come.

About the Dietitian:

D. Milton Stokes is a registered dietitian and freelance writer. He wrote about healthy snacks in this issue's "Nutrition" column.

"What about the fruit?"

Renowned for its high antioxidant content, pomegranate juice is considered a healthful addition to your diet. Likewise, eating the actual pomegranate fruit is just as healthy, plus you'd receive the benefits of fiber and something to munch on when feeling hungry.

When we refer to eating the fruit, it's the seeds themselves. After penetrating its somewhat leathery shell, inside the pomegranate you'll find corn-sized kernels, each surrounded in a sweet and flavorful juice. Some people favor taking the seeds like lozenges—sucking on them and then spitting them out—but they can be ingested entirely.

Take care when handling the fruit, for its vibrant, red juice stains easily. Working over the kitchen sink in a sizable bowl of water will do nicely to prevent stains. The density of the seeds causes them to descend the bowl of water; other nonedible components around the seeds rise to the top. Discard the white matter.

Once separate from the skin and pith, rinse the seeds well and then gently dry. Feel free to experiment by incorporating the seeds with salads, main entrees, and desserts. Their flavor complements an array of foods and dishes, especially those you create yourself. Cooking can be fun with these little seeds!