Eating cherries lowers risk of gout attacks by 35%

September 28 2012

A new study found that patients with gout who consumed cherries over a two-day period showed a 35% lower risk of gout attacks compared to those who did not eat the fruit. Findings from this case-crossover study published in *Arthritis & Rheumatism*, a journal of the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), also suggest that risk of gout flares was 75% lower when cherry intake was combined with the uric-acid reducing drug, allopurinol, than in periods without exposure to cherries or treatment.

Previous research reports that 8.3 million adults in the U.S. suffer with gout, an inflammatory arthritis triggered by a crystallization of uric acid within the joints that causes excruciating pain and swelling. While there are many treatment options available, gout patients continue to be burdened by recurrent gout attacks, prompting patients and investigators to seek other preventive options such as cherries. Prior studies suggest that cherry products have urate-lowering effects and anti-inflammatory properties, and thus may have the potential to reduce gout pain. However, no study has yet to assess whether cherry consumption could lower risk of gout attacks.

For the present study, lead author Dr. Yuqing Zhang, Professor of Medicine and Public Health at Boston University and colleagues recruited 633 gout patients who were followed online for one year. Participants were asked about the date of gout onset, symptoms, medications and risk factors, including cherry and cherry extract intake in the two days prior to the gout attack. A cherry serving was one half

cup or 10 to 12 cherries.

Participants had a mean age of 54 years, with 88% being white and 78% of subjects were male. Of those subjects with some form of cherry intake, 35% ate fresh cherries, 2% ingested cherry extract, and 5% consumed both fresh cherry fruit and cherry extract. Researchers documented 1,247 gout attacks during the one-year follow-up period, with 92% occurring in the joint at the base of the big toe.

"Our findings indicate that consuming cherries or cherry extract lowers the risk of gout attack," said Dr. Zhang. "The gout flare risk continued to decrease with increasing cherry consumption, up to three servings over two days." The authors found that further cherry intake did not provide any additional benefit. However, the protective effect of cherry intake persisted after taking into account patients' sex, body mass (obesity), purine intake, along with use of alcohol, diuretics and anti-gout medications.

In their editorial, also published in Arthritis *& Rheumatism*, Dr. Allan Gelber from Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Md. and Dr. Daniel Solomon from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard University Medical School in Boston, Mass. highlight the importance of the study by Zhang et al. as it focuses on dietary intake and risk of recurrent gout attacks. While the current findings are promising, Gelber and Solomon "would not advise that patients who suffer from gout attacks abandon standard therapies." Both the editorial and study authors concur that randomized clinical trials are necessary to confirm that consumption of cherry products could prevent gout attacks

More information: "Cherry Consumption and the Risk of Recurrent Gout Attacks." Yuqing Zhang, Tuhina Neogi, Clara Chen, Christine Chaisson, David Hunter, Hyon K. Choi. Arthritis & Rheumatism; Published Online: September 28, 2012 (DOI: 10.1002/art.34677).

Editorial: "If Life Serves Up a Bowl of Cherries, and Gout Attacks are "The Pits"… Implications for Therapy." Allan C. Gelber and Daniel H. Solomon. Arthritis & Rheumatism; Published Online: September 28, 2012 (DOI: 10.1002/art.34676).