

# Quinn on Nutrition: An apple a day?

October 15 2021, by Barbara Quinn-Intermill

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Credit: Charles Rondeau/public domain

My grandkids—who can sometimes be picky about certain fruits and vegetables—have a different story when my two apple trees burst forth with sweet crisp fruit this time of year.

"Can we pick some apples, Grammy?" they beg. When my grandson's [apple](#) gets down to the core, he carefully picks out the seeds and tucks

them in his pocket for planting when he gets home. I love that.

Besides being one of the most convenient and tasty snacks around (and a good source of vitamin C), experts say there really may be something to the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."

Researchers in Poland observed that people who ate at least one apple a day had a lower risk for developing colon [cancer](#) than those who did not. They attributed this finding to two possible reasons.

Apples are a rich source of phytochemicals—natural substances that include polyphenols and flavonoids. These plant-based chemicals have the ability to fight off the growth of cancer cells. Apples are also a good source of dietary fiber—another plant substance associated with a lower risk for colon cancer.

Other studies have noted how phytochemicals in apples may help reduce the risk for certain types of cancer. Quercetin, a natural flavonoid in apples, may help reduce the risk for pancreatic cancer. And a research team at Cornell University found other phytochemicals with the potential to kill or slow the growth of at least three different types of human cancer cells: colon, breast and liver.

One rule for apple eating. Make that three. Wash your hands with soap and water. Then wash your apples with [clean water](#) (no soap required, says the U.S. Food and Drug Administration). Lastly, eat your apples with the peel (unless you have a health reason not to). That's where most of the fiber and phytochemicals reside.

Speaking of fiber, apples are a good source of a soluble fiber called pectin. Yep, that's the same substance that causes jams and jellies to gel.

Soluble fibers like pectin are known for their ability to lower cholesterol

and blood sugars as they pass undigested through our intestines. These undigested fibers also feed the friendly bacteria in our guts, which helps overpower the bad sick-causing bacteria.

I start getting [phone calls](#) from neighbors about my apples when they see the full-grown fruit falling off my trees. That's when experts at the University of Illinois Extension say my apples are ready for harvest. They also say apples are ripe when the "under" or "ground" color around the stem changes from green to greenish-yellow. Fully mature apples are also easy to pick right off the tree. My grandkids love that the most. So do I.

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