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Media Contacts Below

SNACKING ON RAISINS MAY OFFER A HEART-HEALTHY WAY TO LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE

Small randomized controlled trial is first to put this potassium-rich fruit to the test

CHICAGO (March 25, 2012) — If you have slightly higher than normal blood pressure – known as prehypertension – consider eating a handful of raisins. New data suggest that, among individuals with mild increases in blood pressure, the routine consumption of raisins (three times a day) may significantly lower blood pressure, especially when compared to eating other common snacks, according to research presented today at the American College of Cardiology’s 61st Annual Scientific Session. The Scientific Session, the premier cardiovascular medical meeting, brings cardiovascular professionals together to further advances in the field.

Even though raisins are popularly cited to lower blood pressure on various websites and are known to have intrinsic properties that could benefit heart and vascular health, researchers believe this is the first controlled study to scientifically support raisins’ blood pressure-lowering effects compared to alternative snacks.

“It is often stated as a known fact that raisins lower blood pressure. But we could not find much objective evidence in the medical literature to support such a claim,” said Harold Bays, MD, medical director and president of Louisville Metabolic and Atherosclerosis Research Center (L-MARC) and the study’s lead investigator. “However, our study suggests if you have a choice between eating raisins or other snacks like crackers and chocolate chip cookies, you may be better off snacking on raisins at least with respect to blood pressure.”

In this investigation, Dr. Bays and his team conducted a randomized controlled clinical trial to compare the blood pressure effect of eating raisins versus other snacks in 46 men and women with prehypertension. Participants were randomly assigned to snack on raisins or prepackaged commercial snacks that did not contain raisins, other fruits or vegetables but had the same number of calories per serving three times a day for 12 weeks. The study controlled for individual differences in nutrition and physical activity.

Data analyses found that compared to other snacks, raisins significantly reduced systolic blood pressure at weeks 4, 8, and 12, ranging from -4.8 to -7.2% or -6.0 to -10.2 mmHg (p values <0.05). Within group analysis demonstrated that raisins significantly reduced mean diastolic blood pressure at all study visits, with changes ranging from -2.4 to -5.2 mmHg (p values < 0.05). Pre-packaged snacks (including crackers and cookies) did not significantly reduce systolic or diastolic blood pressure at any study visit.

“Overall, these findings support what many people intrinsically believe: that natural foods often have greater health benefits than processed foods,” Dr. Bays said.

The study did not identify how raisins lower blood pressure. However, raisins are high in potassium, and have fiber, polyphenols, phenolic acid, tannins and antioxidants.

“Raisins are packed with potassium, which is known to lower blood pressure,” Dr. Bays said. “They are also a good source of antioxidant dietary fiber that may favorably alter the biochemistry of blood vessels, causing them to be less stiff, which in turn, may reduce blood pressure.”

Although this study was not designed or powered to evaluate for outcomes benefits, other studies support that in patients with prehypertension, mild lowering of blood pressure with medications may have clinical benefits in reducing cardiovascular events.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly one in three (28 percent) American adults have prehypertension – defined as a systolic pressure from 120 to 139 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) or a diastolic pressure from 80 to 89 mm Hg. This study’s findings help validate some current nutritional recommendations. For example, 60 raisins – about a handful – contain 1 gram of fiber and 212 milligrams of potassium, which are both recommended in the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet.

Dr. Bays cautions that this was a single site study; larger trials are needed to confirm the blood pressure-regulating effect of raisins. Nonetheless, he says work in this area is particularly exciting because applying similar scientific methods to natural products, as required for drug development, provides consumers with objective data about which foods may or may not benefit heart health.

This study was funded by the California Raisin Marketing Board through a grant to L-MARC Research Center.

Dr. Bays will present the study “Raisins And Blood Pressure: A Randomized, Controlled Trial” on Sunday, March 25, 2012 at 11 a.m. in McCormick Place South, Hall A.

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The American College of Cardiology (www.cardiosource.org) is a 40,000-member nonprofit medical society comprised of physicians, surgeons, nurses, physician assistants, pharmacists and practice managers. The College transforms cardiovascular care and improves heart health as it supports and advocates for quality improvement, patient-centered care, payment innovation and professionalism. The ACC bestows credentials upon cardiovascular specialists who meet its stringent qualifications and leads the formulation of health policy, standards and guidelines. It provides professional education, supports and disseminates cardiovascular research, and operates national registries to measure and promote quality.

The ACC’s Annual Scientific Session brings together cardiologists and cardiovascular specialists from around the world each year to share the newest discoveries in treatment and prevention.

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