

FIVE HEALTHY HOLIDAY FAVORITES BY MARY JO KURTZ

So much of our Thanksgiving traditions revolve around having certain foods at our celebrations. In fact, since we know that nature provides us with exactly what we need during the year many of these traditional foods are loaded with health benefits too. We've included some of our favorites, their health benefits and a few ideas on how to use them. So now, when you indulge you can feel good about your choices.

PUMPKIN

Whether you use pumpkin puree, the seeds or pumpkin seed oil the health benefits are tremendous. This bright orange veggie is rich in beta-carotene which converts to vitamin A and is a good source of potassium and fiber. Recent studies have shown that the seeds may help men avoid prostate cancer! Lightly roast the seeds and add to cereals, salads, or create your own trail mix with nuts and dried fruits. Drizzle pumpkin seed oil over salmon or other fish for a delicious flavor. Try adding pumpkin spice to warm soy milk for a delicious warm beverage. Use puree in your favorite cakes, pies and muffins. For the kids, try adding a nutritional boost to ketchup by adding a bit of pumpkin puree to your bottled organic version.

CRANBERRIES

We've all heard how important berries are in our diet, but we usually think of the spring and summer berries like strawberries, blueberries and others. Don't forget the cranberry! This berry is a great source of vitamin C. It contains phytochemicals that prevent bacterial infections of the urinary tract and other bacterial diseases; it is also a good source of antioxidants and flavonoids such as anthocyanins which act as an anti-inflammatory. Cranberries can be added to baked goods, salads, cereals, smoothies, rice and grain dishes. Of course, try making your own relish for Thanksgiving this year.

POMEGRANATES

Recent studies suggest that this fruit may help combat cancer. Rich in antioxidants, pomegranates lower LDL (bad) cholesterol, improve oxygen levels associated with coronary heart disease, may help prevent prostate cancer, delay the growth of tumors, reduce the risk of breast cancer, reduce inflammation and reduce diarrhea. You can pop the seeds right into your mouth or add them

to your salads for a tart and tasty crunch; use them in marinades, glazes garnishes, oatmeal, pancakes, cereal, cakes, puddings and other fruit desserts.

PECANS

These nuts contain more disease fighting antioxidants than any other common nut and their health benefits can be compared to berries and cherries. Pecans help lower cholesterol and are loaded with heart-healthy unsaturated fats.

Pecans contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals such as vitamin E, folic acid, calcium, copper, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, zinc and several B vitamins. They can decrease the risk of cancer, heart disease, and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer's. They can lower cholesterol. Recent studies indicate that consumption may increase metabolic rates and enhance satiety.

Therefore, these nuts can have a positive impact on weight loss. Try dry roasting them in a pan or in the oven with some added spices; toss on salads, cereals, baked goods; grind them and use to coat chicken or fish.

CINNAMON

One of the most common spices used this time of year, cinnamon has numerous health benefits. Recent studies have shown that between $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon per day can help control blood sugar by making insulin more efficient. It can also help lower levels of cholesterol, ease allergies, relieve pain, fight bacteria and fungi, reduce gas, and relax muscles. Use this spice in your teas, cooking, baking and smoothies. Add on top of oatmeal, cereals, yogurt, applesauce, carrots, and squash.