

**Strawberries: The Super Fruit that's Super Smart for Your Heart**  
By David Grotto, RD, LDN, author of *101 Foods That Could Save Your Life!*

We've all heard the term "Super Fruit." It's a common term used today to describe fruits loaded with nutrients. But did you know that strawberries rank number two among the top ten fruits in antioxidant capacity? Not only are strawberries nutrient-rich, this sweet, delicious ruby fruit provides an abundance of heart-health benefits.

As a registered dietitian (or "guy-a-titian" as I like to say), heart health is an extremely important issue since heart disease continues to be the leading cause of death of both men and women in the United States. While health experts contend that the best approach to fighting heart disease is to follow a heart healthy lifestyle that includes regular physical activity and a diet low in sodium, cholesterol, saturated and trans-fatty acids – it's equally important to consume foods that provide such heart healthy essentials as fiber, potassium and antioxidants. That means consuming plenty of whole grains, vegetables and fruit.

Strawberries are a perfect match for heart health because they not only contain those essential elements but they are also naturally fat, sodium and cholesterol-free with one serving (about 8 strawberries or 1 cup) containing a mere 50 calories. Strawberries also help control three of the risk factors associated with heart disease: high cholesterol, high blood pressure and high homocysteine levels.

So let's talk about those risk factors. First up, **cholesterol** ....

Antioxidants in strawberries can help lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol as part of a diet low in saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, as demonstrated by David Jenkins, MD, PhD, in a recent study published in the scientific journal, *Metabolism*.

Participants in the study had elevated cholesterol levels and had previously been on a cholesterol-reducing "portfolio-style" diet that includes beans, legumes, oat bran and okra. They were either instructed to eat approximately three cups of strawberries each day for one month or to consume additional oat bran bread.

The participants in the group that ate strawberries not only maintained their lowered cholesterol and triglyceride levels but also had less of the harmful oxidized form of LDL cholesterol in comparison to the group that consumed additional oat bran bread.

The American Heart Association recommends a variety of fiber-rich foods in the diet for overall health. However, soluble fiber is considered the most effective form of fiber in its ability to block some cholesterol from being absorbed in the body. Strawberries are a great addition to a healthy diet because of the two grams of fiber contained in a one-cup serving, most of which is soluble. According to Jenkins study participants, the sweet, delicious strawberries improved the taste of the cholesterol-lowering diet, making it easier to follow over the long-term.

Now on to **blood pressure**...

High blood pressure (or hypertension) is often referred to as the silent killer because it has no symptoms yet is highly dangerous because it can lead to stroke. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), stroke is the third leading cause of death for Americans. The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) diet is a proven dietary program for reducing high blood pressure and maintaining normal blood pressure levels. One of the cornerstones of the diet is fruits and vegetables high in the mineral potassium which helps counter the negative effects of sodium on blood pressure. A single serving of strawberries provides 170 mg of potassium or five percent of the Daily Value (3,500 mg) for potassium. Combining strawberries with other foods from the DASH diet that contain potassium makes it easier – not to mention tastier -- to meet your potassium requirements.

Finally, let's talk about **homocysteine**...

One serving of strawberries contains 35 micrograms of folate. What makes folate so important? Folate helps maintain normal blood levels of an amino acid called homocysteine. Too much of this amino acid is related to a higher risk of heart disease. Evidence suggests that homocysteine may promote atherosclerosis (fatty deposits in blood vessels) by damaging the inner lining of arteries and promoting blood clots. The folate in strawberries may help keep homocysteine in check.

Strawberries are also rich in groups of plant chemicals called flavonoids, which include substances such as anthocyanins - compounds responsible for the rich red color of strawberries - and polyphenols such as ellagic acid. These plant chemicals (also called phytochemicals) may help reduce the damage by free radicals that contributes to heart disease. Free radicals are created when oxygen interacts with certain molecules produced by the body during metabolism.

So, are you ready to add more strawberries to your diet? This nutritious and delicious “super fruit” should be a staple, and thanks to California’s ability to grow strawberries year-round, you can enjoy strawberries at peak freshness anytime!

With celebrations from Mother’s Day to graduations around the corner, the following recipe for strawberry shortcake from my book is the perfect, classic finale to any meal.

Enjoy and stay heart-healthy! - *Dave Grotto*

For references on the health benefits of strawberries, visit [www.calstrawberry.com](http://www.calstrawberry.com).

### **Strawberry Shortcake**

by Heather Jose

*American Indians crushed strawberries and mixed them with cornmeal which they baked into a bread. Colonists loved it so much that they eventually developed their own version and “Strawberry Shortcake” was born!*

Servings: 12

Prep and cooking time: 25 minutes

#### **Shortcake:**

2 cups Hodgson Mills Insta-Bake Baking Mix (or Bisquick)

2 tablespoons butter or plant sterol margarine

2/3 cup soy milk (plain or vanilla)

2 tablespoons agave nectar or honey (optional)

#### **Strawberry Topping:**

1 quart fresh California strawberries rinsed and halved

¼ c. agave nectar or honey

#### **Directions for the shortcake:**

Heat oven to 425 degrees. In medium bowl combine Insta-Bake and butter until crumbly. Add soy milk and agave, if using, and stir to make a soft dough. Mix until dough pulls away from the bowl. Spread into a sprayed or nonstick 8 or 9 inch cake pan or drop by spoonful onto a sprayed baking sheet. Bake for 10-12 minutes or until golden brown, may be longer for cake pan.

Yields 10-12 individual shortcakes or 8 pieces.

#### **Directions for the Strawberry Topping:**

Pour the rinsed and halved strawberries into a medium bowl and add the agave nectar. Using a potato masher, smash the strawberries to desired consistency. Place a piece of shortcake into a bowl and ladle the strawberry topping over the top.

***Break it down...***

Calories: 170; Total Fat: 3g; Saturated Fat: 1.5g; Cholesterol: 5mg; Total Carbs: 33g; Dietary Fiber: 3g; Sugars: 14g; Protein: 3g; Sodium: 180mg.

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