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Why red wine and blackcurrants are sexual superfoods

Flavonoid-rich foods like blueberries and red wine prevent erectile dysfunction, scientists have found



Berries and wine could improve sexual function in men, says Harvard Photo: Getty Images



By Sarah Knapton, Science Editor

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Improving your sex life could be as simple as drinking **red wine** and eating more fruit.

A 40 year study by Harvard and University of East Anglia scientists has found that middle-aged men who enjoyed a regular glass of red wine, and plenty of citrus fruits and berries were less likely to develop erectile dysfunction.

Researchers found just three or four portions or glasses of flavonoid-rich food and drinks were associated with a reduced risk of the problem.

Of all the different flavonoids, Anthocyanins - found in blueberries, cherries, blackberries, radishes and blackcurrant, flavanones and flavones, found in citrus fruits, were found to offer the greatest benefits in preventing the condition. Chocolate also contains flavonoids but is likely to have less impact.

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Professor Aedin Cassidy, University of East Anglia

It is already known that increased exercise can improve erectile function, but the new research shows that eating a flavonoid-rich diet is as good for erectile function as briskly walking for up to five hours a week.

The study also showed that a higher total fruit intake was associated with a 14 per cent reduction in the risk of erectile dysfunction. And a combination of consuming flavonoid-rich foods with exercise can reduce the risk by 21 per cent.

"We already knew that intake of certain foods high in flavonoids may reduce the risk of conditions including diabetes and cardiovascular disease," said lead researcher Professor Aedin Cassidy, of the **University of East Anglia**.

"This is the first study to look at the association between flavonoids and erectile dysfunction, which affects up to half of all middle-aged and older men.

"Flavonoids are present in many plant-based foods and drinks including fruits, vegetables, tea, herbs and wine.

"We examined six main types of commonly consumed flavonoids and found that three in particular - anthocyanins, flavanones and flavones - are beneficial.

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Blackcurrants are a sexual superfood

More than 50,000 middle aged men were included in the study. They were asked about their ability to have and maintain an erection sufficient for intercourse - dating back to 1986.

Figures on dietary intake was also collected every four years.

The researchers took into account a range of factors such as body weight, physical activity, amount of caffeine consumed, and whether the participants smoked.

More than a third of the men surveyed reported suffering new onset erectile dysfunction. But those who consumed a diet rich in anthocyanins, flavones and flavanones were less likely to suffer the condition.

Prof Cassidy said: "The top sources of anthocyanins, flavones and flavanones consumed in the US are strawberries, blueberries, red wine, apples, pears, and citrus products.

"We also found that the benefits were strongest among younger men."



A few glasses of red wine each week could perk up men's sex life Photo: Alamy

The researchers also looked at other lifestyle factors and found that men who consumed a high intake of anthocyanins and flavanones and who were also physically active had the lowest risk of erectile dysfunction.

Study senior author Professor Eric Rimm, of Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, added: "As well as improving sexual health for middle-aged men, there is another important benefit linked to heart health.

"Erectile dysfunction is often an early barometer of poor vascular function and offers a critical opportunity to intervene and prevent cardiovascular disease, heart attack and even death.

"Men with erectile dysfunction are likely to be highly motivated to make healthier lifestyle choices, such as exercising more and eating the right foods - which would greatly benefit their long-term cardiovascular health as well."