

# OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

## The Fashionable Fig — Healthy and Hip

*Figs are the latest in-style, hip fruit gracing celebrity hot-spot restaurants from Los Angeles to Paris. But the fig won't just make you hip — it can also make you healthy. With over 50 varieties to choose from — and countless ways to prepare and enjoy this ancient delicacy — it's truly one of the most delicious, versatile, nutritious and fashionable foods available.*



Dr. Baker promotes the inclusion of nutritionally rich foods, such as figs, as part of the *chiropractic lifestyle*: a philosophy that focuses on preventing disease and illness with regular chiropractic care, exercise and proper nutrition.

Dried figs share top honors with dried plums for having one of the highest nutrient scores among dried fruits. What's more, they are loaded with powerful, disease-fighting antioxidant chemicals.

2005;24:44-50.) Oxidative stress is the process that turns healthy cells into diseased ones, which occurs in cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and a myriad of other conditions.

### Carotenoids Carrier

Figs are loaded with nutrients and provide a rich source of dietary fiber, according to Dr. Baker. They're also pleasantly plentiful year-round, particularly in their dried state or as preserves.

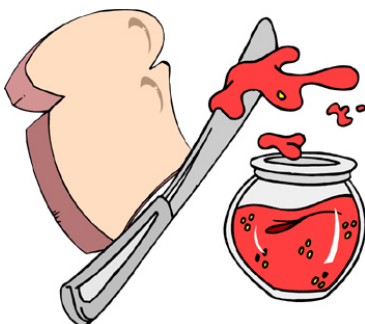
Researchers from the University of Scranton found that "figs produced a significant increase in plasma [blood] antioxidant capacity for four hours after consumption, and overcome the oxidative stress of consuming high fructose corn syrup in a carbonated soft drink." (*J Am Coll Nutr*

Carotenoids are fat-soluble plant pigments. In addition to sparking antioxidant activity in the body, some of the more than 600 carotenoids can transform themselves into vitamin A.

The skins of the tiny but nutritionally powerful fig range from greenish-brown and greenish-yellow to strawberry-brown and the brown-purple of the "Hardy Chicago" variety. Inside, the fruit is equally multi-hued.

In fig-friendly regions, such as Hawaii and San Diego, some trees produce three crops a year. In most regions, however, the season includes a summer crop — with fewer, but larger, figs — and a primary fall crop.

### Antioxidant Amplifier



### Wellness Education From Dr. Joseph Baker

Nutrition is an integral component of wellness. That's why once a month, we present an *Optimal Health University™* focused on cutting-edge nutritional research.

A founding principal of chiropractic is that the mind, body and spirit are connected. Therefore, during the other weeks of the month, we offer topics on how to prevent additional physical, chemical and emotional causes of *vertebral subluxations*.

Chiropractic care centers on the correction of dysfunctional areas in the spine termed *vertebral subluxations*. This condition is linked with an array of disorders, including asthma, ear infections, back pain, carpal tunnel syndrome and headaches. Dr. Baker uses gentle and effective maneuvers called *chiropractic adjustments* to correct vertebral subluxations and prevent recurrence.

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Why are carotenoids so important? Because, among other things, studies link them to the prevention of several cancers.

Figs contain all of the major carotenoids found in blood plasma, according to researchers in Australia (*Eur J Clin Nutr* 2002;56:1149-54).

### The Nutrient Numbers

Figs have no saturated fat, sodium or cholesterol. They are also high in calcium, iron and potassium. A quarter cup has 3.7 milligrams of potassium and just 93 calories.

When it comes to calcium, three dried figs provide 80 milligrams of this bone-boosting mineral. In comparison, one cup of milk contains 300 milligrams of calcium.

Some fruits, including figs, increase in sugar content as they age. That's why fresh is best for diabetics.

One medium (2 ¼ inches in diameter), fresh fig has just 10 carbohydrates, according to the American Diabetes Association. Generally speaking, diabetics try to keep carbohydrates levels down to 45 per meal and 15 per snack. And with just 37 calories, one medium-sized fig is definitely a diet-friendly food!

### Don't Leave the Leaves

According to researchers in China, fig leaves possess an anti-HSV-1 effect. Also known as oral herpes, HSV-1 causes mouth blisters.

Not only did the water extract from the fig leaves kill the HSV-1 virus, it did so with low toxicity to patients (*Zhong Yao Cai* 2004;27:754-6).

Fig leaves are used in a number of Mediterranean and European recipes, primarily as an edible, all-natural wrap. For instance, enveloping herb-seasoned fillets of fish with fig leaves seals in juices and ensures moist, flaky fish.

If — like most people — you don't own a fig tree, you'll find the leaves of

this fabulous fruit in the produce section of higher-end grocery stores and specialty shops.

### Adding Figs to Your Diet

Looking for a truly unique and healthy way to dress up a salad? Then toss in a handful or two of freshly chopped figs!

The best way to “chop” dried figs is to cut them with kitchen-only scissors. When the scissors start to become sticky, simply run them under warm water.



Fig preserves are also readily available. But make sure to choose varieties containing 100 percent fruit with no added refined sugar.

### Delectable Dates

Dates have the same nutritional value and health benefits as their figgy cousins. Found nestled among the broad leaves of date-palm trees, a single fruit cluster can yield 600 to 1,700 dates.

Just how close is the date-fig family? When it comes to cooking, the two may be used interchangeably. And dates, like figs, are low in fat and protein but rich in sugars, dietary fiber and minerals (*J Agric Food Chem* 2005;53:7586-91).

### Figs and Mulberries

What do figs and mulberries have in common? In a small but potentially significant study, allergies to one were

linked to allergies in the other. Researchers in Italy determined that “hypersensitivity to figs and mulberries might be associated as the result of allergen cross-reactivity rather than mere coincidence.” (*Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol* 2003;91:493-5.)

### More on Fig Allergies

Different parts of the fig can spark diverse allergic reactions, but experiments show that fig skin is more likely to trigger allergies than fig pulp (*Int Arch Allergy Immunol* 2003;131:138).

As with any food, take caution to watch for allergic reactions.

### Let's Talk

As your partners in preventive health care, one of our goals is to provide you with the information you need to make well-informed nutritional decisions for yourself and your entire family. That includes understanding the latest in nutritional research. Please let us know if you have any questions or suggestions for future **Optimal Health University**® handout topics.

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