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An ‘Apple a Day’ Could Help Keep Your Cardiologist at Bay

BOSTON - Recent research out of the University of Michigan Health System – a premier academic medical center – has found that adding more apples and apple products to your diet may be an easy way to lower your risk for developing heart disease. More than one in three U.S. adults has one or more types of cardiovascular disease (CVD) according to the American Heart Association. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States.

Researchers presented their initial study results this week at the American Dietetic Association (ADA) Annual Food and Nutrition Conference and Exposition. Dr. Mitch Seymour, the lead researcher on the study reports, “When rodents prone to obesity were given a higher fat diet – similar to a ‘typical American’ diet – and fed a freeze dried powder made from whole apples (roughly equivalent to two medium-sized apples per day), the results showed a heart health benefit that went beyond cholesterol reduction alone.”

Although the exact mechanisms that yield this benefit are still unclear, the research team speculates that reduction in oxidative stress, a critical component of heart disease, may play a prominent role. The researchers suspect that the phytochemicals (or antioxidant components) in apples help reduce oxidative stress in the rodents and contribute to improved measures of blood pressure – ultimately reducing overall heart damage. (Although not tested in this study, it is possible that products made from whole apples, like apple juice, cider, or applesauce, may confer similar benefits.)

In the study, the rodents were given either a ‘standard’ diet, a diet with apple pectin (most notable as a source of dietary fiber), or a diet with freeze-dried powder made from whole apples. The amount of food, total calories, sugars and fiber content of the diets was held constant for each group. At the end of four months, researchers examined the following markers for heart disease: cholesterol level, oxidative stress level, blood pressure, and overall heart function.

Initial results, discussed and presented at the ADA meeting this week showed that both the whole apple powder and the apple pectin reduced cholesterol levels. In addition, the whole apple powder also reduced oxidative stress (as measured in the blood samples), reduced blood pressure, and increased heart function.

For more information on the health benefits of apples and apple products, please visit: www.usapple.org and www.appleproducts.org

Reference: Seymour EM, Spink HC, Kondoleon MG, Urcuyo-Llanes DE, Bolling SF. Apple intake reduces hypertension and cardiac pathology in obese rats with metabolic syndrome. American Dietetic Association 2010 Poster Presentation (unpublished).

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The U.S. Apple Association (USApple) is the national trade association representing all segments of the apple industry. Members include 40 state and regional apple associations representing the 7,500 apple growers throughout the country, as well as more than 400 individual firms involved in the apple business. USApple's mission is to provide the means for all segments of the U.S. apple industry to join in appropriate collective efforts to profitably produce and market apples and apple products.

The Apple Products Research & Education Council (APREC), formerly the Processed Apples Institute, is a coalition of U.S.-based producers of processed apple products.