Superfoods Fact Sheet
Goji Berry
(Lycium Barbarum)

Parts used: Berry

Also called wolfberry, and gou qi zi goji berries are delicious little berries that don’t store well so are usually eaten dried. They grow in temperate and subtropical regions of China, Mongolia and Tibet, and are a member of the nightshade family.

They are bright orange red and have been used for thousands of years to promote health and longevity. A staple of Chinese medicine they are not only known as a longevity food but also as a strength builder and for sexual potency.

Historic and Traditional Uses

It is probably most useful to look at how goji has been used traditionally to give us further insight into how goji berries may be useful. They have been used as part of Traditional Chinese Medicine for thousands of years, and are said to act on the Kidney and Liver meridians. Amongst their documented use has been:

- Protecting the liver
- helping eyesight
- improving sexual function and fertility
- strengthening the legs
- boosting immune function
- improving circulation
- promoting longevity.

Amongst the claims for longevity is the story of a man called Li Qing Yuen who supposedly consumed goji berries daily and lived to be 252 years old! Needless to say, this has not been supported. There is also the story of a village in China where the inhabitants live to a ripe old age and were rarely ill. Investigation showed that their well water was rich in the compounds from goji berries which fell into the well from a nearby tree.

Health Benefits

There has been only limited medical research concerning goji berries on humans.

Cancer

A published study in China found that 79 people with cancer responded better to treatment when goji berries
were added to their regime. Further research is required to understand why this might be. There have also been several test tube studies that suggest goji extracts may help prevent the growth of cancer cells, although further work is needed to confirm this.

Extracts of the polysaccharide LBP from goji berries have been found by research to actually trigger the self-destruction of leukemia and breast, prostate, colon and liver cancer cells.

**Immune Function**

One study found that goji berries restored antioxidant capacity and immune function in aged mice.

**Antioxidant**

With its high antioxidant ORACs score of 13,500 per 100 gm, goji berries should bring health benefits relating to the problems associated with free radical damage and inflammation in the body.

**Other Benefits**

Besides this goji berries may also help improve vision, treat anaemia, coughs and provide sedative effects. Rich in zeaxanthin which is thought to decrease the risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, it also protects the retina of the eye by absorbing blue light. Compounds containing beta-carotene may have anti-ageing benefits around immune function, vision and heart disease, and there is some research that suggests goji berry extracts may help boost brain health, possibly having a protective effect against Alzheimer’s, although nothing conclusive has been published as yet.

Other studies using goji berry juice have found benefits to mental well-being, calmness, athletic performance, happiness, quality of sleep and sense of well-being, although they are only preliminary and need following up. Promising test tube studies have also been done on reducing blood glucose levels and lower cholesterol levels using goji extracts.

Animals studies have suggested that goji berries might help improve metabolism, energy levels and even help with weight loss, whilst some human studies have reported better digestion, less fatigue and stress and an improved sense of well-being.

Goji berries also have a long history of being used to boost sexual libido and some studies – admittedly only in animals so far – would seem to prove their ability to boost libido, improve sexual performance, increase sperm quality and motility as well as improve fertility!

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Nutritional Value

One of the most nutritionally dense fruits on earth goji berries contain many nutrients and phytochemicals including:

- 11 essential and 22 trace dietary minerals
- 18 amino acids
- 6 essential vitamins
- 8 polysaccharides and 6 monosaccharides
- 5 unsaturated fatty acids including linoleic acid and alpha-linolenic acid
- beta-sitosterol and phytosterols
- 5 carotenoids - beta-carotene, zeaxanthin, lutein, lycopene and cryptoxanthin
- various phenolic pigments associated with antioxidant properties
- high in fibre

Goji berries contain *lyceum barbarum* polysaccharide-protein complexes known as LBP, which have potent antioxidant qualities as well as being highly anti-inflammatory and anti-ageing and protective to the body and the immune system.

Beta siterol and other plant sterols appear to block the absorption of cholesterol in the digestive tract, thereby helping improve cholesterol levels. Polysaccharides appear to inhibit the growth of certain cancer cells, enhance the immune system and provide neuro-protective actions.

Taken together, the chemical constituents in goji berries are thought to maybe reduce blood sugar and blood pressure levels in the body.

Goji berries also contains natural anti-inflammatory, anti-fungal and anti-bacterial compounds as well as having powerful antioxidant properties.

Per 100 gm of dried berries they supply

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>112 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium</td>
<td>1132 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>9 mg iron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc</td>
<td>2 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selenium</td>
<td>50mcg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>1.3 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
<td>29 – 148 mg*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta-carotene</td>
<td>7 mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeaxanthin</td>
<td>2.4 – 200 mg*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*depending on source
How To Use

Goji berries can be added to smoothies or breakfast cereals, eaten as a snack, blended into soups, sprinkled on salads or even juiced.

Always chose a sulphite free source and as some sources make heavy use of pesticides chose organic wherever possible.

Possible Drug Interactions

Although eating goji berries appears to be safe there is some suggestion that it could increase the effect of anti-coagulant medicines such as warfarin\(^8\), potentially causing uncontrolled bleeding. There are also queries around blood sugar medications and high blood pressure medications.

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