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**US: Cherries found to be natural sleep aid**

There is a tart cherry called Montmorency that contains a significant level of melatonin and hence is helpful as a natural sleep aid. The University Of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio recently discovered these properties in the tart cherry.

Melatonin was discovered in 1958 by a dermatologist named Aaron Lerner at Yale University.

Melatonin is a natural hormone that is produced in the pineal gland located at the base of the brain. It triggers sleepiness during night hours. Melatonin production can be disrupted because of staying up at night utilizing artificial light. Melatonin has been found to decrease with age. This is why elderly people often have trouble sleeping or staying asleep at night. Stress can also cause melatonin levels to drop thus causing poor sleep and insomnia.

**What Foods Contain Melatonin?**

Melatonin is most plentiful in tart cherries, especially the Montmorency variety. Other foods including milk, peanuts, turkey, chicken and almonds contain tryptophan. Tryptophan raises brain serotonin which then can be converted to melatonin.

Bananas also contain melatonin but the level is not high enough to be effective for inducing sleep.

**Side Effects of Melatonin**

Taking melatonin supplements should be done carefully. A high level of melatonin in the blood can cause insomnia and nightmares instead of the desired peaceful rest. The maximum effective sleep-inducing dose is 0.1 to 0.3 milligrams.

The level of melatonin found in tart cherries provides a significant amount to positively induce sleep. Melatonin is sold in over-the-counter supplements, although these supplements often have a dosage of 2-3 milligrams and sometimes even higher. These levels are at least ten times the maximum effective dosage.

**Best Melatonin for Sleep**

Although melatonin is easily obtained as a supplement and can be purchased without a prescription, experts tell us that the greatest benefits of melatonin are achieved by consuming melatonin through food consumption.

An effective strategy for better sleep is to utilize nature. Cherries can be obtained in concentrate form and can be taken at the end of each day to improve the quality of resting time, to reset your biological clock and to encourage wakefulness during the day.

**Other Benefits of Melatonin**

Melatonin may also help delay the effects of aging. Researchers at the University of Granada in Spain recently revealed that melatonin neutralizes the oxidative and inflammation process caused by aging. This suggests that melatonin may slow the aging process. These researchers are suggesting that daily melatonin intake (especially for people from age 30 or 40) could potentially help delay some illnesses related to aging.

**How to Enjoy Cherries Daily**

Tart cherries are readily available year-round. Dried and frozen tart cherries and cherry juice (or juice concentrate) are easy to find. Here are some ways to incorporate tart cherries into your daily diet.

1. Add dried cherries to trail mix or granola.
2. Add dried cherries to your cereal, oatmeal, yogurt or pancakes.
3. Add dried cherries to tossed salads, fruit salads and chicken salads.
4. Make cherry muffins instead of blueberry muffins.
5. Add dried cherries to oatmeal cookies instead of raisins.
6. Add dried cherries to couscous, rice pilaf, grits, risotto and pasta.
7. Add frozen cherries to smoothies.
8. Thaw frozen cherries for a few minutes and then layer with yogurt and granola.
9. Make a cherry spritzer by adding cherry juice concentrate to cold seltzer water.
10. Drink cherry juice as you recover from a workout. Some experts think cherry juice may help relieve exercise tension.

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