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Apple Cider Vinegar: Elixir or Hoax?

By Debbie DeAngelo
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Apple cider vinegar (ACV) ... either you appreciate the taste, or you don't. There doesn't seem to be any middle ground on this one.

You may be wondering why anyone would consider tossing it back on a daily basis. Frequently I hear people reminisce about their grandparents swearing by ACV as a tonic for general health because it “cures what ails you.” There are many reasons for consuming this tart potion that has been passed down through the generations. Since vinegar isn't generally considered harmful, and it won't break the bank, it may not even matter if these claims can be proven. But if

you've ever wondered whether or not apple cider vinegar has a sweet side, just know that there is some evidence for using it.

ACV is derived from the fermented juice of crushed apples. First, the fruit sugars are converted to alcohol (cider) by yeast, and then bacteria transform it into acetic acid (vinegar). Whenever the label advertises that the product contains the "mother," it refers to the strands of yeast and bacteria that you can see floating around in the bottle. The medicinal properties of ACV are in part attributed to the "mother" as it's comparable to a probiotic. The antioxidants are also powerful healers.

Perks

Besides making a flavorful salad dressing or marinade, ACV does appear to carry health benefits. There is some promising research indicating that it aids in lowering blood sugar levels after eating. Given the rising rates of pre-diabetes and diabetes, this could be a beneficial adjunct to proper nutrition and medication in normalizing blood sugar.

A 2021 review and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials published in the BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies journal concluded there was a significant favorable effect of ACV consumption on blood glucose and lipid levels. A 2017 study in Diabetes Research and Clinical Practice reported similar results. One flaw of these studies is that the same amount of vinegar wasn't consistently used, so knowing how much to recommend isn't an exact science.

Equally interesting is the connection between routine vinegar usage and weight loss. There have been a handful of studies demonstrating ACV's assistance with weight loss when used in conjunction with a reduced calorie diet. For example, a 2018 randomized clinical trial reported in the Journal of Functional Foods compared weight loss in participants who were either on a calorie-restricted diet alone or the diet plan along with taking a total of two tablespoons of ACV daily, divided between two meals. Over the course of 12 weeks, the ACV group experienced greater weight loss and reduced appetite. I wouldn't recommend discontinuing your gym membership anytime soon; however, unless vinegar is contraindicated for you, it's worth a try.

You may have heard that using ACV at meals minimizes mild indigestion and bloating. Although the scientific evidence is scant, anecdotally, it does seem to work. This recommendation is typically espoused by naturopathic-oriented practitioners and has its roots in traditional medicine. As a health coach, I have made this suggestion to the majority of my clients with successful feedback. Keep in mind that people with ulcerations of the esophagus and stomach or those with Barrett's esophagus, are not candidates for this remedy as it may worsen these conditions.

Pucker Up!

If you're ready to give apple cider vinegar a shot, there are a few things to keep in mind before downing it. As mentioned, this acidic solution can aggravate Barrett's disease or any type of ulcerations or irritation of the throat and stomach. For everyone else, it's advised to dilute it in two ounces of water, so that it does not erode tooth enamel. Drinking it through a straw helps too. Needless to say, if you're allergic to apples or pectin, then avoid ACV. If you take medicine for chronic conditions, be sure to check with the pharmacist for potential interactions. ACV is believed to lower potassium slightly, so if your blood levels are low or you're taking medicine that decreases potassium, be sure to speak with your healthcare provider.

There is no blanket dosage that is advised for everyone. The amount used in research studies has ranged from one teaspoon to two tablespoons. As a general rule, people gradually work up to one tablespoon of ACV in two ounces of water, twice daily, at the two largest meals.

When selecting a product, look for one that contains the "mother." When you shake the bottle, you should see the strands of microbes floating throughout. At home, store the bottle out of direct sunlight, in a cool place. Even though ACV is available in forms such as tablets, capsules, powder and gummies, there is considerable variation among these products. It's best to stick with the actual vinegar.

Bottoms Up!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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