



FOOD *as*
MEDICINE



A Daily Dose of Blueberries

Fruits and vegetables provide essential nutrients to support health and well-being

“Let food be thy medicine,” a proverb commonly attributed to Hippocrates, reflects a concept that has regained prominence in modern healthcare. Today, this idea is embodied in ‘Food is Medicine’ — a growing set of evidence-based interventions that integrate the prescription of healthy foods into healthcare settings to prevent, manage and treat diet-related chronic diseases.¹ Food is Medicine (FIM) is now a key component of federal and state-level strategies aimed at improving population health while reducing healthcare spending.

The need for these interventions is urgent. Nearly 3 out of 4 American adults have at least one chronic disease,² many of which are exacerbated by poor nutrition.

\$50 Billion

The estimated annual healthcare cost of poor diets in the U.S.³



The Escalating Cost of Poor Nutrition

Research indicates that poor diet quality, including insufficient fruit and vegetable intake, accounts for almost 20 percent of healthcare costs associated with cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes.³ Overall, poor diet contributes an estimated \$50 billion annually to U.S. healthcare expenditures.³

Food is Medicine: An Evidence-Based Solution

In response, states across the country are piloting FIM programs with bipartisan support. These programs often provide participants with prescriptions for fruits and vegetables, nutrition education, and regular clinical follow-up. Blueberries are a natural fit for FIM interventions: they are widely available year-round in fresh and frozen forms, easy to incorporate into meals and snacks and supported by a growing body of research demonstrating positive health outcomes. Early results indicate that these programs can improve patient outcomes while generating healthcare cost savings, particularly for populations at high risk of diet-related disease.^{4,5} Many FIM pilots were created with support from Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)⁶, and momentum is growing at the federal level to expand and sustainably fund FIM initiatives. Together with existing nutrition assistance programs, these efforts can help ensure that nutrient-rich foods — such as blueberries — are accessible to all.

Types of Food is Medicine Programs

“Food is Medicine” is an umbrella term that encompasses a spectrum of treatments from produce prescriptions (PRx) to medically tailored meals (MTM) to medically tailored groceries (MTG), all prescribed through referrals from healthcare providers.

- PRx programs allow healthcare providers to prescribe produce, such as blueberries, to eligible patients due to diet-related health risks or conditions, or challenges in accessing nutritious foods. Produce prescriptions are typically provided as vouchers or debit cards for free or discounted produce, distributed by healthcare providers, and can be redeemed at various locations.
- MTM are prepared meals delivered to patients with severe, complex or chronic conditions that are customized to treat individuals’ specific health conditions.
- MTG are prepackaged boxes or bags of perishable and nonperishable grocery items designed to address specific health conditions.

Nutrition Spotlight: Blueberries

Consuming a variety of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables is a cornerstone of health. Blueberries are a prime example, delivering meaningful nutrition in a modest serving.

One serving of blueberries (about 1 cup or a handful):

- Counts as one full serving of fruit
- Contains just 80 calories and is a good source of fiber
- Naturally sweet with zero added sugar
- Contributes essential nutrients including vitamin C, vitamin K, manganese, dietary fiber and phytonutrients called polyphenols.
- Contains anthocyanins (163.3mg/100g), the flavonoid compounds responsible for blueberries’ vibrant blue color
- Delivers a good source of fiber (~4 g) and vitamin C (~14 mg)
- Provides an excellent source of manganese (0.5 mg) and vitamin K (0.25 mcg)



USHBC is Leading the Charge for Produce

- Proud member of the National Produce Prescription Collaborative, an organization that leverages Produce Prescriptions as prevention & intervention for diet-related diseases
- Exploring opportunities to reach health professionals and organizations at the cutting edge of Food is Medicine programs and integrate blueberries into Food is Medicine interventions
- Supporting research investigating the effects of blueberry consumption on brain health, heart health, diabetes and supporting good health throughout the lifespan

Key areas
of health
research
include:



Cardiovascular
Health



Brain Health



Healthier Living



Insulin Response



Gut Health

References

¹ ‘Food is medicine’ shows potential for improving diet quality and food security | American Heart Association

² About Chronic Diseases | Chronic Disease | CDC

³ Americans poor diet drives \$50 billion a year in health care costs | NHLBI, NIH

⁴ Medicaid Nutrition Supports Associated With Reductions In Hospitalizations And ED Visits In Massachusetts, 2020–23 | Health Affairs

⁵ Medicaid Spending and Health-Related Social Needs in the North Carolina Healthy Opportunities Pilots Program | Health Care Economics, Insurance, Payment | JAMA | JAMA Network ⁶ Select Policy Pathways for Food Is Medicine Interventions | odphp.health.gov