Can Cherries Relieve The Pain Of Osteoarthritis?

ScienceDaily (Mar. 21, 2009) — For the estimated 27 million Americans who suffer from osteoarthritis, pain relief may come with a cherry on top. According to researchers with the Baylor Research Institute, tart cherries, in pill form, may be a promising pain-reliever for this common and debilitating form of arthritis.

More than half of the patients enrolled in a 2007 pilot study at the Baylor Research Institute experienced a significant improvement in pain and function after taking the cherry pills for eight weeks. Osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis, is considered degenerative and typically affects the hands, feet, spine, and large weight-bearing joints, such as the hips and knees. Patients with osteoarthritis of the knees were enrolled in this pilot study to assess potential efficacy of the tart cherry pills.

“The current treatment of osteoarthritis is largely focused on controlling pain through use of over-the-counter acetaminophen or prescription pain medications as well as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs,” explains John J. Cush, M.D., rheumatologist and principal investigator of the study. “These conventional medications are widely used, but have not been shown to alter the natural history of the disease. In some cases, overuse may contribute to significant gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, hematologic, renal and liver toxicity.”

Made from Montmorency tart cherries, this preparation is made up of ground whole cherries and given as a soft gelatin capsule (marketed under the brand name CherryFlex®).

“This specific type of tart cherry is one of the best studied natural products and anecdotally has been claimed to have a salutary effect on osteoarthritis and other types of arthritis as well,” adds Dr. Cush.

Baylor Research Institute together with the Arthritis Care & Research Institute is currently enrolling patients in a second study, which will test cherry pills versus placebo in an eight-week double blind study.