



Eat Me

Pretty please with
antioxidants on top

by Apryl Chapman Thomas

Benefits of Antioxidant Rich Foods

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT the colors of summer, does your mind immediately conjure up images of red raspberries and strawberries? What about the dark blue hue of blueberries, or the crisp green of broccoli or garden greens? Summertime in New England means longer, warmer days and more time spent outdoors with the chance to enjoy fresh fruits and vegetables. For many, fresh, locally-grown produce is one of the best parts of the season, right up there with fireworks and trips to the beach.

Whether you are savoring fresh foods as a snack or as a part of a meal, you may not realize their benefits to your body. Not only do they taste wonderful, but fruits and vegetables are key to a well-balanced diet and are rich in antioxidants. You may be asking yourself what exactly are antioxidants, and more importantly, why do I need them and where can I find them?

"We have always needed antioxidants," says Roberta L. Duyff, registered dietitian and author of American Dietetic Association Complete

Food and Nutrition Guide (2006). Duyff says we are hearing the word antioxidant more often because of many recent medical studies that have cumulatively created a thorough understanding of how different antioxidants affect us. "We are in different period now. Years ago, we were talking the importance of vitamins and minerals. While those are still important, now it is about antioxidants and how they work."

To understand how antioxidants work, you first need to understand what is going on inside your body, according to Georgianna Donadio, PhD, director of the National Institute of Whole Health, a holistic certification program for medical professionals. She explains that antioxidants protect your body from the process of oxidation.

"Oxidation produces what are known as free radicals. These damaged cells are missing an electron, and try to fix themselves by attaching to healthy cells to steal their electrons. These undesirables eventually damage and kill healthy cells."

She adds that free radicals can be caused by environmental pollutants, but are also a by-product of some normal body processes, such as digestion. While you can limit your exposure in some situations, what can you do about those free radicals that you have no control over? "Eat a diet that is rich in antioxidants," says Donadio.

ABOUT ANTIOXIDANTS

Simply put, antioxidants are a group of natural substances found in food. "These particular nutrients have been shown to slow down the free radicals in the body and slow down damage to the body," says Donadio.

She adds that the best-known antioxidants are Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin E and certain minerals. Donadio stresses that you cannot get the full benefit of the antioxidants in a vitamin pill, especially the Vitamin A complex. The reason is that the terms we use to identify each vitamin actually refers to a whole range of chemicals. Food generally includes a broad range of the vitamin, whereas vitamin pills are



of New England produce as a treasure trove of antioxidants. Match the best local produce with the best produce from other parts of the country and world to keep your body happy and healthy. Here are some items for your dinner plate:

BERRIES

Berries are something of a miracle food. Not only do they work as antioxidants, but they have other benefits as well. For instance, cranberries can help prevent and treat urinary tract infections. In addition, studies are showing that cranberries may also promote gastrointestinal and oral health, stop the formation of kidney stones, lower LDL and raise HDL (good) cholesterol, aid in recovery from stroke, and even help prevent cancer.

Blueberries, raspberries and blackberries are rich in proanthocyanidins, antioxidants that can help prevent cancer and heart disease. Strawberries, raspberries and blackberries contain ellagic acid, a plant compound that combats carcinogens. Further, blueberries aid in the improvement of memory and mental functions, and are extremely beneficial for eye health.

ORANGES

Oranges are a popular and potent source of vitamin C, which is essential for heart and lung health, kidneys, bones and more.

POMEGRANATE

Even though they are messy to eat, pomegranates are extremely good for you. This fruit is packed with powerful antioxidants known to control blood pressure, help aid in the prevention of cancer, and possibly slow down the aging process.

CACAO

Rich in magnesium, cacao provides a high content of the antioxidant flavanol that promotes healthy heart function and aids in building muscles. Cacao can be found in the more exotic "raw chocolate" bars.

BROCCOLI

Beta-carotene rich broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables—such as cabbage, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts—can help prevent cancer and heart disease. They also can help reduce the risk of breast, ovarian and cervical cancer.

TOMATOES

Tomatoes can help prevent certain kinds of cancer, macular degeneration and cataracts. The lycopene in this fruit is seen to lower rates of prostate, lung, colon and breast cancer. Tomatoes can also help boost the immune system. However, arthritis sufferers should consult with their doctors before consuming tomatoes, as tomatoes are known to cause complications with some forms of arthritis.

RED GRAPES

The potent resveratrol and quercetin found in red grapes reduce platelet aggregation and helps blood vessels remain open and flexible. Resveratrol also protects against cancer and reduces the risk of inflammatory diseases, gastric ulcers, stroke and osteoporosis.

GARLIC

This herb's antioxidants help prevent cancer, heart disease and reduce the effects of aging. Garlic also lowers cholesterol levels, reduces blood pressure, and helps prevent blood from clotting.

SPINACH

Filled with the antioxidant lutein, spinach can help protect your vision from developing cataracts and macular degeneration. Lutein may also help prevent heart disease.

CARROTS

Carrots strengthen the immune system, prevent lung cancer, and promote overall health to the skin, eyes, lungs and intestinal tract.

WHOLE GRAINS

Vitamin E, found in grains, can aid in the prevention of cancer, especially prostate cancer. Other studies have found that it can boost immunity, slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease, treat and possibly prevent arthritis. Whole grains are also rich in phytic acid, which can help protect against breast, colon and liver cancers.

When you're enjoying summer season, be sure to indulge in the best of summer produce, including the best that New England has to offer. One bite of a garden-fresh tomato, still warm from the sun, or a crisp, cool carrot, and you'll swear you can feel the antioxidants kick in right away. Eat well, be healthy, and live long — there's no better time to start than this summer! 🍅

likely to only have one form. Another reason to seek your nutrition in veggies rather than pill form is that it is nearly impossible to ingest too much of one vitamin through food, while taking too many pills can lead to a toxic concentration of a vitamin—which will make you feel worse, not better.

Each antioxidant has its own effect, says dietician Duyff. For example, "Vitamin C found in tomatoes and citrus fruit is water-soluble, and removes the free radicals from fluids. Vitamin A and Vitamin E are fat soluble and flush free radicals from fat." She points out that whole idea is to eat a variety of whole grains, vegetables, fruits and lean meats, such as chicken and fish. "The more variety that you eat, the better off your body will be," advises Duyff.

ANTIOXIDANT-RICH FOODS

Summer is the perfect season to add some new, colorful and healthy foods to your diet. At your next visit to a local farm stand, or even in your backyard garden, you'll start to see the displays