



antioxidants 101

Just what are antioxidants, how do they work and why is everyone talking about them? | **By Christine M. Palumbo, RD**

You may know they're beneficial, but would you be able to explain what antioxidants actually do in the body? Didn't think so.

Simply put, antioxidants are compounds that protect our body's cells from the oxidation process that occurs naturally every day. Like a bicycle that gradually rusts if left out in the yard, our bodies "rust" from environmental pollutants and aging. Eventually this rusting can lead to diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, Alzheimer's Disease, eye disorders, immune dysfunction and loss of memory and coordination.

Some antioxidants are probably familiar to you: vitamins A, C and E, and minerals like selenium, zinc, beta carotene, and lycopene are all well-known antioxidants. There are others, though, that you just don't hear about. For instance, have you ever heard of zeaxanthin, catechins, proanthocyanidins and allyl methyl trisulfide? These are definitely hard to pronounce, and there are still others that are just hard to find. Researchers speculate there may be thousands of antioxidants, just waiting to be discovered.

Although our bodies make some antioxidants on their own, most of these important compounds need to come from our diet. We can ensure we get them by eating as many different plant-rich whole foods (e.g., peppers, dark, leafy greens and fruits) as possible.

And studies back up the health claims: A 2006 Colorado State University study

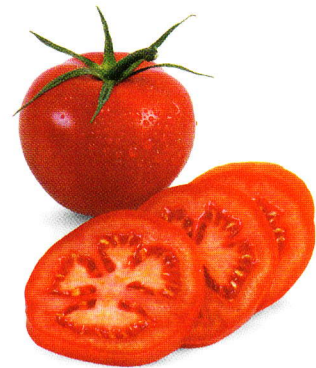
revealed that an increased variety of high-antioxidant fruits and vegetables in our diets increases our levels of protection against the effects of disease and aging. So small amounts of lots of different produce may offer more health benefits than larger quantities of just a few favorites.

Although antioxidant supplements are widely marketed, it's best to get them from food. The entire combination of compounds found in whole foods needs to be present in order for antioxidants to provide their protective effect. In fact, studies suggest antioxidant supplements actually may even do more harm than good.

To find antioxidant-rich foods, start out in the produce department, and follow the advice to "eat the rainbow." That means selecting a variety of vegetables and fruits from all the color groups. Examples include grapefruit (pink), tomatoes (red), cherries (red-purple), mangoes (orange), lemons (orange-yellow), avocado (yellow-green), bok choy (green) and artichokes (white-green).

By eating a wide variety of minimally processed foods, you're bound to nourish your body with age-slowng compounds, and enhance your life and your health. **W**

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Good Café Choices

- Top your cheese pizza with onions, mushrooms, red and green peppers, extra oregano and spinach.
- Add salsa to eggs, baked potatoes or on any foods you would use condiments.
- Throw a handful of chopped nuts and some raisins into your oatmeal.
- Toss beans, nuts and lean proteins into salads or soups.
- When eating fresh tomatoes, include the peel and seeds as often as possible (that's where much of their antioxidant power resides).
- Enjoy your morning coffee or tea—knowing that you're drinking your antioxidants.