

Antioxidants 101

Antioxidants are substances found in healthy foods that act in the body to protect cells from damage. Cell damage happens naturally as we age. It also happens when we are exposed to things like pollutants or cigarette smoke. Cell damage can lead to illnesses such as heart disease and cancer.

An antioxidant can be:

- A vitamin such as vitamins A, C or E
- Plant chemicals like flavonoid and carotenoids
- A mineral such as selenium



What foods are rich in antioxidants?

Berries – blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries and cranberries

Beans – small red beans, kidney beans, pinto beans and black beans

Fruits - many apples (with the peel), avocados, cherries, green and red pears, fresh or dried plums, pineapple, kiwi, and more

Vegetables – artichoke, spinach, red cabbage, red and white potatoes (with peel), sweet potatoes and broccoli

Beverages – green tea, coffee, red wine and many fruit juices

Nuts – walnuts, pistachios, pecans, hazelnuts and almonds

Herbs – ground cloves, cinnamon, ginger, dried oregano leaf and turmeric powder

Grains – oat-based products are higher in antioxidants than those derived from grain sources

Dark chocolate – ranks just as high as or higher than most fruits and vegetables in terms of antioxidant content

Food sources vs. supplements

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You can get all the antioxidants you need from eating a healthy diet containing a variety of antioxidant rich foods. While a supplement may contain only one type of antioxidant, foods contain several hundred forms, making it the better choice.

Tips for increasing the antioxidants in your diet:

- Add broccoli, spinach, Brussels sprouts, potatoes, and red, yellow, or green peppers to stir fry dishes or serve them with low fat dip
- Add strawberries and raspberries to yogurt or a smoothie, or mix them into a fruit salad
- Sprinkle almonds or sunflower seeds on salads or add them to granola and cereal
- Choose fish at least twice a week. Mackerel, herring, salmon, halibut and tuna are good sources of vitamin E
- Have tomato sauce on top of whole wheat pasta or brown rice
- Roast or bake carrots, sweet potato and squash in the oven

Sources: <http://www.eatrightontario.ca>

<http://www.mayoclinic.org>

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