



Foods from blueberries to chocolate are getting the healthy stamp because of their antioxidant content, but are antioxidants really that good for us?

Much of what we are exposed to every day from pollution to smoke to healthy activities like exercise can produce free radicals that have the potential to injure the healthy cells in our body. Antioxidants can stabilize these free radicals, preventing them from causing damage. In healthy people, the free radicals and antioxidants are in a good balance. When this balance is upset, for example as we age, our healthy cells become exposed to the free radicals. The damage they cause is thought to play a role in many diseases including cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's and others.

The way that antioxidants protect us would make it seem that they have a clear role in preventing disease. Unfortunately it isn't that simple. The research on individual antioxidants and their role in disease prevention hasn't shown a clear benefit and in some cases actually showed risk. Where there is promise, however, is in the benefits of eating foods that are rich in antioxidants overall.

Antioxidants can be found in foods in many forms including carotenoids, flavonoids and vitamins E and C, among others. The advice to eat a variety of colorful foods comes in part from the fact that the color of a food can be a sign of its antioxidant content.



Carotenoids are found in red, orange, deep-yellow and some dark-green leafy vegetables, like tomatoes, carrots, spinach, Brussels sprouts, sweet potatoes, winter squash and broccoli.



Vitamin E is found in vegetable oils, salad dressings, wheat germ, whole-grain products, seeds, nuts and peanut butter.



Flavonoids are found in berries, cherries, tea, cocoa, grapes and cinnamon.



Vitamin C rich foods include citrus fruits (oranges, grapefruits and tangerines), strawberries, sweet peppers, tomatoes, broccoli and potatoes.

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