

WHAT ARE ANTIOXIDANTS?

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The word 'antioxidants' has been commonly used throughout the media to promote many health benefits such as preventing cancer, reducing heart disease and slowing aging. But what exactly are antioxidants and why do we need them? In this fact sheet, we explore the benefits of antioxidants, and how to include a variety of antioxidant rich foods in your diet in order to reap the benefits.

WHY ARE ANTIOXIDANTS GOOD?

To understand why antioxidants are beneficial, one must first be aware of the effects of free radicals on the body. Free radicals are unstable molecules which can lead to an increased risk of certain cancers and diseases.

These molecules are formed as part of normal metabolism, as well as from external factors such as cigarette smoke, charred pieces of meat and certain food preservatives.

Whilst the body requires some free radicals to function properly, the build up of these molecules has been shown to increase the risk of cardiovascular and heart disease, as well as some cancers.

SEVEN TIPS TO INCREASE ANTIOXIDANT INTAKE

1. Aim for five servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit per day. Fruits and vegetables are both rich sources of antioxidants.
2. Try steaming vegetables when cooking. Nutrients including vitamin C can be lost when vegetables are boiled in water.
3. Use good quality oil when cooking such as olive oil, sunflower oil or peanut oil.
4. Choose the most colourful vegetables, in particular look for vegetables that have a dark rich colour or those that are brightly coloured.
5. Include green tea or black tea daily.
6. Include nuts as a snack or add in cooking such as including cashews into stir fry based dishes or adding walnuts into salads.
7. Include herbs and spices in cooking. Certain herbs and spices have been shown to be rich in antioxidants such as oregano, thyme and cloves.

COMMON ANTIOXIDANTS TO BOOST YOUR INTAKE

PRESENT IN	ANTIONIDANT	POTENTIAL BENEFITS
 Pumpkin, carrots and mango.	Beta-carotene	Improves vision and protects skin from UV damage.
 Strawberries, kiwi fruit, oranges and capsicum.	Vitamin C	Improves cardiovascular health, and aids in reducing the risk of dementia.
 Nuts, seeds, avocado and whole grains.	Vitamin E	Reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease.
 Tea, onion and citrus fruit.	Flavonoids	Has antiviral and antibacterial properties. Protects the immune system.
 Lentils, milk and soy beans.	Isoflavones	Helps to prevent osteoporosis.
 Coffee, bran and wheat germ.	Polyphenols	Aids in promoting cardiovascular health.
 Tomatoes, watermelon and pink grapefruit.	Lycopene	Reduces risk of some cancers including gastrointestinal and prostate.
 Spinach, celery, brussel sprouts and broccoli.	Lutein	Helps in maintaining good vision and reducing risk of cataracts.