

## **Antioxidants protects your body**

Antioxidants are like an army in your body, fighting against free radicals and oxidative stress. They are often misunderstood and not appreciated. This time of year, as we are exposed to multiple kinds of bacteria and viruses included COVID 19, it is worth exploring the functions, benefits, and food sources of these powerhouses.

Natural body functions such as breathing and physical activity, as well as cigarette smoke or pollution produces substances called free radicals that attack healthy cells. Stress and infections from bacteria and viruses, cause additional free radical formation. Antioxidants help protect healthy cells from the damage, or oxidative stress, caused by these free radicals. Oxidative stress and free radicals can lead to heart disease, cancer, diabetes, dementia, arthritis, eye diseases, aging processes, and other health issues.

The benefits of antioxidants include the ability to protect us against chronic disease, infection and cognitive decline and other things. What is important to understand is that we can and should be able to get plenty of these mighty defenders from natural food sources and not supplements. Studies have shown that some antioxidant supplements increase health risks and interact with other medication. Supplements can also give you a concentrated source of one or more antioxidants while neglecting others. There are other compounds in foods that improve both the absorption and function of antioxidants, compounds that cannot be duplicated in supplements.

Antioxidants are abundant in food sources. The best way to reap the benefits is to eat 2 cups of fruits and 2 ½ cups of vegetables every day. Specific antioxidants and food sources include:

- Vitamin C: berries, citrus, kiwi, tomatoes, peppers, potatoes, and broccoli
- Vitamin E: olives, avocados, spinach, beet greens and pumpkin
- Carotenoids – such as beta-carotene, lycopene, and lutein: red (beets, tomatoes), orange (squash, carrots), green (spinach, kale, Brussel sprouts) and purple (cauliflower, eggplant) vegetables

Additional food sources for antioxidants include nuts, coffee, tea, wine, and dark chocolate. They contain a long list of antioxidants including resveratrol, polyphenols, catechin and flavanols.

No one individual antioxidant can do everything, so be sure to get a variety of foods, of all colors, from all food groups. Enjoy eating while your army of antioxidants do the work for you.

Source: Colorado State University Extension