Top 20 Foods High In Antioxidants

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Antioxidants are all the rage. Where do we get them? Truth be told, there's a huge variety of foods that eliminate cancer-causing free radicals and lead to better health.

According to the USDA, antioxidants remove free radicals from the body which can run rampant and actually damage cells, causing serious illness. Many health professionals use them for treatments of stroke and neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. They have also been helpful in treating brain injury and may slow and even prevent development of cancers.

There are numerous choices for antioxidant-rich foods, but which ones are really the best? The USDA tested over 100 foods from all categories and developed an authoritative list of the top 20:

1. small red beans
2. wild blueberries
3. red kidney beans
4. pinto beans
5. cultivated blueberries
6. cranberries
7. artichokes
8. blackberries
9. prunes
10. raspberries
11. strawberries
12. red delicious apples
13. Granny Smith apples
14. pecans
15. sweet cherries
16. black plums
17. russet potatoes
18. black beans
19. plums
20. gala apples
21. dark leafy greens

Don't like any foods on the list? Not to worry. The American Dietetic Association has jumped on the band wagon with their comprehensive guide to foods highest in antioxidants arranged by food groups:

Fruits

Many fruits are high in antioxidants, packed with vitamins, and beneficial in a myriad of ways. These include cranberries, red grapes, peaches, raspberries, strawberries, red currants, figs, cherries, pears, guava, oranges, apricots, mango, red grapes, cantaloupe, watermelon, papaya, and tomatoes.

Dried Fruits

With the water removed, the antioxidant ratio is higher in dried fruits than in fresh. They can easily be carried with you in your purse, briefcase or car and they make a quick healthy snack. Consider taking along dried pears, plums, apples, peaches, figs, dates and raisins. However, be careful of sugar content; avoid dried fruits that have processed sugars added to them to make them sweeter.

Vegetables

Didn't your mother always tell you to eat your vegetables? Broccoli, spinach, carrots and potatoes are all high in antioxidants, and so are artichokes, cabbage, asparagus, avocados, beetroot, radish, lettuce, sweet potatoes, squash, pumpkin, collard greens and kale.

Spices and Herbs

Using lots of spices in cooking is good. Many are loaded with antioxidants, like cinnamon, oregano, turmeric, cumin, parsley, basil, curry powder, mustard seed, ginger, pepper, chili powder, paprika, garlic, coriander, onion and cardamom. Herbs include sage, thyme, marjoram, tarragon, peppermint, oregano, savory, basil and dill weed. All contribute complexity and flavor to your meals, but also are high in antioxidants.

Cereals and Nuts

Your morning corn flakes, oatmeal and granola bars pack a healthy punch, as do walnuts, hazelnuts, pistachio nuts, almonds, cashews, macadamia nuts and even that peanut butter sandwich.

Beverages

Contrary to popular belief, most of our antioxidants come from beverages. Apple juice, cider, tomato juice, pomegranate juice and pink grapefruit juice seem obvious, and green tea has become very popular as a source, but black tea and plain tea have high levels also. Here's good news for those who love that cup of joe in the morning: coffee is high but should be consumed in moderation. Note that adding milk to coffee or tea blocks antioxidants. Speaking of moderation, red wine and especially beer (since it comes from grains) provide a big dose, and the healthy effects of moderate alcohol consumption have been well documented.

Remember to eat a variety of fruits and vegetables in a myriad of colors. Don't just focus on the top 2 or 3 choices. Foods with darker, richer colors like orange, yellow, blue, and red tend to be higher in antioxidants, and with all these choices, you'll never become bored or run out of delicious, nutritious options. Variety is the spice of life.