

# ANTIOXIDANTS

THE BODY'S HELPFUL ARMY



By Johanna Burani, MS, RD, CDE

You may have seen or heard the word antioxidant. What does it mean? Is it good or bad for the body?

*Antioxidant* means "to be against oxidants." Oxidants (or "free radicals") are harmful products in the body that come from normal body actions, like breaking down food for energy or even just breathing. Oxidants also come from the world around us, like chemical wastes, unclean air and cigarette smoke. They can attack cells in the body and hurt them.

## HOW DO ANTI-OXIDANTS HELP?

Antioxidants protect you from oxidants. Your body knows how to deal with oxidants. It uses antioxidants in the foods that you eat every day to control

A well-balanced diet with many different whole foods gives your body plenty of antioxidants to defend it against disease.

them. However, if there are not enough helpful antioxidants or there are too many harmful oxidants, cell damage may result. This may lead to some types of cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, poor vision, arthritis, asthma and skin infections.

If you have diabetes, it is easier to develop heart disease, cancer and inflammation problems. The good news is that certain foods help protect your body from these health problems. A list of foods to eat is to the right.

## SUPPLEMENTS

Should you take supplements, like pills or powders, to get your antioxidants? It is always best to take natural goodness directly from the food itself. If you have some problems that prevent you from eating enough antioxidant-rich foods, then you might consider using supplements.

**8** food groups packed with antioxidants

### ① FRUITS

apples (red), apricots, blackberries, blueberries, cantaloupe, cranberries, grapes (red), guava, oranges, papaya, peaches, pink grapefruit, prunes, raspberries, strawberries, watermelon

### ② VEGETABLES

beans (black, cannellini, garbanzo, kidney, pinto), beet greens, bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, collard greens, garlic, kale, leeks, onions, pumpkin, red and green bell peppers, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, yellow squash

### ③ PROTEIN FOODS

eggs, lean cuts of meat, seafood, tofu

### ④ WHOLE GRAINS

brown rice, whole cornmeal, oats, whole-wheat flour, 100% whole-wheat, whole-grain or whole-rye breads and crackers, whole-wheat pasta

### ⑤ BEVERAGES

black and green tea, coffee, fat-free and low-fat milk enriched with vitamins A and D, soy milk, red wine

### ⑥ OILS

peanut, safflower, soybean, sunflower

### ⑦ SNACK FOODS

nuts (almonds, peanuts, walnuts)

### ⑧ OTHER FOODS

flaxseed, wheat bran, wheat germ