

## Super Benefits of Antioxidants

Aging is big business, and the vast choice of products on the market today has blurred the line between health and beauty. Many of these products contain antioxidants, said to promote wellness and fight aging. Advertising has sold us on the benefits of antioxidants, but it's important to understand exactly what they are and how they work.

Antioxidants are naturally occurring nutrients present in the human body, and in many plants including fruits and vegetables. Our bodies need antioxidants to function properly; as cell protectors, they maintain good health by slowing the destructive aging of cellular molecules.

During normal cellular function, the cells produce damaged molecules called free radicals. These free radicals can cause even more damage to the body, as they steal vital components including protein, fat and DNA from other cellular molecules. Left unchecked, these free radicals can cause a multitude of serious health concerns including a weak immune system, cataracts, heart damage and cancer.

One of the main benefits of antioxidants is their ability to stabilize free radicals. By providing stabilizing components, antioxidants help prevent widespread cellular destruction and reduce further damage to the system. Antioxidants return to the surface level of cells, steadying them rather than causing damage to other components.

Studies have shown that antioxidants have the ability to improve immune responses and vaccine recognitions in cats and dogs. This can be particularly useful when vaccinating young animals that lack fully developed immune systems. In older animals, antioxidants are significant in reversing the reduction of immune cell functions. Further studies have revealed that a combination of many different antioxidants given in average amounts is likely more effective than high levels of one single antioxidant.

In the human body and plant life, naturally occurring antioxidants come in different forms. Vitamins A, C and E, and carotenoids including beta-carotene and lutein are familiar sources of antioxidants. These nutrients are the basis of our good health, especially beneficial in preventing heart disease as they block the spread of free radicals. Vitamin E, in particular, is a common form of antioxidant that can protect against cardiovascular disease by defending against the LDL oxidation and artery-clogging plaque development. Numerous studies have shown that the benefits of antioxidants also include a reduced risk of cancer. Vitamin C has been shown to lower rates of mouth, larynx and esophagus cancers.

Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of antioxidants. Brightly and deeply pigmented foods such as tomatoes, red bell peppers, carrots and spinach offer the highest concentrations of this essential health-booster.

While there is no doubt that the benefits of antioxidants are many, it remains unclear as to exactly how much should be taken, or whether antioxidants should be supplemented at all. Further, the long-term consequences of taking mega-doses of antioxidants are not known. Antioxidants occur naturally but they are a chemical, and must be taken with due caution.

Speak with your doctor if you're thinking about boosting your body with the benefits of antioxidants.