

Berries Are Best

The fruit wars are under way! First it was the **acai berry**. Then **mangosteen** - then **goji**. And now it seems like there is a new exotic fruit marketed each month. And the hype about these exotic fruits is truly amazing. The supplement manufacturers would lead us to believe that each one of them has unique polyphenols that provide outstanding antioxidant properties and wondrous health benefits. And, of course, there are marvelous testimonials for each one of them (Remember that the placebo effect can be as high as 50% for intangibles like energy and well being).

So what do the experts tell us? They say that common berries - things like red raspberries, black raspberries, blackberries, blueberries and strawberries - are just as beneficial as the exotic fruits, if not more so. For more information on the health benefits of berries I would highly recommend reading the articles in the **February 13, 2008 issue of the Journal of Agricultural Food Chemistry that came from a recent International Berry Health Benefits Symposium.**

The lead article by Navindra Seeram (p627-629) summarized the key findings of the symposium. Dr. Seeram described the polyphenol composition and antioxidant potential of berries. He also summarized the evidence that berry consumption decreases the risk of many diseases - and slows the aging process. One of the papers (p630-635) detailed the evidence that berry consumption decreases cancer risk. For example, animal studies showed that black raspberry powder significantly decreased carcinogen-induced esophageal cancer.

Follow-up studies were performed in humans with Barrett's esophagus - a pre-malignant condition that increases the risk of developing esophageal cancer by 30-40 fold. Again, these patients were given black raspberry extract. The final results of this study are not yet available, but the preliminary results showed that the black raspberry extract significantly decreased urinary excretion of markers of oxidative stress.

There were other papers in that issue of the Journal of Agricultural Food Chemistry detailing the evidence showing that berry consumption also **slows the aging process and decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease, obesity and pre-diabetes.**

So what is the bottom line? We know that diets high in fresh fruits and vegetables substantially decrease the risk of all of those diseases. We also know that of the many fruits that are part of a healthy diet, berries are superstars. They are chock full of vitamins, minerals and polyphenols. They are also antioxidant powerhouses. And the evidence supporting the health benefits of berries is at least as strong, if not stronger, than the evidence for the health benefits of those exotic fruits that we've been hearing about.

That is precisely why the experts are telling us that we don't need to go to South America or the South Pacific to find the perfect fruits. They are growing in our own back yards!

To Your Health!
Dr. Stephen G Chaney