

FIGHT BACK WITH PHYTONUTRIENTS

Phytonutrients are bioactive compounds in food that promote your health by helping to slow the aging process or reducing the risk for many diseases. Phytonutrients may protect against some cancers, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke and other chronic health conditions. In addition, they might work to enhance immunity, detoxify carcinogens and serve as antioxidants.

Research shows that most fruits and vegetables contain phytonutrients. Plants produce these substances naturally to protect themselves against viruses, bacteria and fungi. They also provide color, aroma and flavor to food.

Some have a remarkable variety; one orange contains more than 170 different phytonutrients! These substances work together with other nutrients and fiber for good health.

Paint Your Plate with Color

Take advantage of nature's palette of color to enhance food's eye appeal and health benefits. Your eyes tell your brain that great-tasting food is on the way when a variety of colors is on your plate. Also, research is uncovering the benefits of the pigment-related phytonutrients and the colorful fruits and vegetables that supply them.

Add these colors to your plate to get great flavor and health benefits:

Orange and deep yellow: fruits — apricot, cantaloupe, grapefruit, mango, papaya, peach, pineapple; vegetables — carrots, yellow pepper, yellow corn, sweet potato. Carotenoids, bioflavonoids and the antioxidant vitamin C in these foods promote a healthy heart, vision, immunity and reduced risk for some can-

cers. The deeper the orange/yellow color, the more carotenoids they have.

Green: fruits — avocado, apple, grapes, honeydew, kiwi, lime; vegetables — artichoke, asparagus, broccoli, green beans, green pepper, leafy greens. Their lutein and indoles have antioxidant potential and may help promote healthy vision and reduce cancer risks.

Purple and blue: fruit — blackberries, blueberries, plums, raisins; vegetables — eggplant, purple cabbage, purple-fleshed potato. Anthocyanins, which give a blue-purple color, and phenolics may have antioxidant and anti-aging benefits and may help with memory, urinary tract health and reduced cancer risks.

Red: fruit — cherries, cranberries, pomegranate, red/pink grapefruit, red grapes, watermelon; vegetables — beets, red onions, red peppers, red potatoes, rhubarb, tomatoes. This color group delivers lycopene, a powerful carotenoid, as well as anthocyanins. They may help maintain a healthy heart, vision and immunity and may reduce cancer risks.

White, tan, brown: fruit — banana, brown pear, dates, white peaches; vegetables — cauliflower, jicama, mushrooms, onions, parsnips, turnips, white-fleshed potato, white corn. Allicin in onion (and garlic) and selenium in mushrooms may promote heart health and reduce cancer risks.

A rainbow of fruits and vegetables creates a palette of nutrients and phytonutrients on your plate, each with a different bundle of potential benefits in a healthful eating plan — from oxidizing free radicals that may damage healthy cells to having anti-inflammatory qualities to lowering LDL cholesterol. Enjoy foods that are a treat for your eyes — and your body.

Adapted with permission from American Dietetic Association, www.eatright.org.

