

Antioxidants

Free radicals are a problem, but we have ways of fighting them.

Because free radical production is a natural part of living, your body has a natural defence, but by eating more of the right foods you can pack a real punch and knock free radicals for six!

Natural bodily enzymes are the first line of defence against free radicals – these can minimize the damage caused by free radicals and also repair any damage which does happen. Antioxidants play a key role in these defence mechanisms. The most commonly known ones are vitamins A, C & E and the minerals selenium, zinc and copper.

Vitamins A and E are fat soluble, so they work best in lipid rich places like cell membranes, the brain, nerves and fatty tissue.

Vitamin C is water soluble and works in the watery areas inside and outside cells. Vitamin C also helps vitamin E to keep working.

Outward signs of aging, heart disease and some cancers are thought to be just some of the beneficiaries of a good intake of antioxidants.

Many phytochemicals also have antioxidant activity. Thousands of phytochemicals have been discovered and there are probably many thousands more still waiting to be discovered. A few to mention are:

- Lycopene – found in tomatoes, red grapefruit and water melon. Cooked tomatoes are a particularly good source.
- Lutein – found in dark green leafy vegetables, blackcurrants and potatoes.
- Quercetin – found in black tea and red wine.
- Glucosinolates – Found in broccoli, cauliflower, brussels and cabbage.

Supplements of single vitamins or 'antioxidants combinations' are available as too are phytochemicals (for example 'green tea extract' or lycopene). However, supplements can be expensive and the best way to ensure a wide ranging and adequate intake of the antioxidant nutrients (which includes vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and who knows what else) is through a varied and balanced diet including at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables.

Check out these ideas for getting a powerful antioxidant hit:

- Fruit smoothie – try strawberry and raspberry
- Steamed cauliflower, broccoli and peas
- Fresh berries on breakfast cereal
- Wilted baby spinach leaves
- Handful of raisins and almonds
- A mixed salad with celery, tomatoes, sweetcorn and broccoli
- Fresh fruit salad – with orange segments, grapes, kiwi and cherries.