

Brighten Up Your Diet!

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RECENT reports indicate that the health benefits of certain fruit and vegetables vary dramatically according to their colour.

So what colour food should you buy? CHARLOTTE DOVEY asked nutritionist Dr Beckie Lang to explain.

BROCCOLI

THE king of vegetables, broccoli contains folate, which is important in the formation of red blood cells, and vitamin K - vital for blood clotting and bone health.

It contains varying amounts of chemicals such as lutein and indoles.

Lutein is a carotenoid, meaning a natural colourant or pigment. It plays an important role in protecting the eyes, especially against cataracts.

Indoles may have a protective effect against breast and cervical cancer.

Purple broccoli, in addition to this, contains anthocyanins which give it its colour. These have antioxidant effects, which are thought to lower the risk of some cancers and maintain a healthy urinary tract.

Antioxidants also help to reduce the number of toxic substances in the body which have been known to lead to cancers, cardiovascular disease and even Alzheimer's.

Healthiest colour? Purple.

CABBAGE

RED cabbage contains carotenoids - the compound which gives it its red colour and is the most widespread of all plant colourings.

When eaten, the body converts this into retinal (vitamin A) which plays essential roles in vision, growth and development; the development and maintenance of healthy skin and hair; immune functions and reproduction.

Like the green and white cabbage it also contains quercetin - one of the most abundant antioxidants in fruit and vegetables.

This has many health-promoting effects including improvement of cardiovascular health and reducing the risk of cancer. As an antioxidant, it also reduces the cancer risk of prostate, ovary, breast, gastric and colon cells.

Healthiest colour? Red.

GRAPES

NUTRITION-WISE, grapes are quite poor, but there are some health benefits.

All varieties contain gallic acid believed to have anti-fungal and antiviral properties.

But red grapes also contain high levels of the compounds quercetin and rutin.

A high intake of this, more usually in the form of red wine, may explain why the French seem to suffer less from coronary heart disease than other Europeans, even though their consumption of cholesterol-rich foods is higher.

Red grapes also contain the compound resveratrol - which again may help reduce cardiovascular disease and cholesterol.

Healthiest colour? Red.

MELONS

THOUGHT to be nothing more than a watery mush, the red-fleshed watermelons are extremely good for you.

Packed full of the antioxidant lycopene, they also contain cryptoxanthin which may help protect against cervical cancer.

The orange-fleshed Cantaloupe melon is also packed full of goodness.

Containing nearly three times more calcium (good for the bones and teeth) than a watermelon, it also contains loads of carotene (which the body converts into vitamin A). The green-fleshed Galia melon contains none.

Healthiest colour? Joint winners - red watermelon and orange Cantaloupe.

POTATOES

ALL potatoes contain vitamin C - required for the growth and repair of tissues in all parts of your body.

Vitamin C is also essential for the healing of wounds, and for the repair and maintenance of cartilage, bones and teeth.

Red-skinned potatoes have the added benefit of carotenoids (vitamin A) in the skin, but sweet potatoes are laden with it both in the skin and in the orange-coloured flesh itself.

Healthiest colour? The redskinned, yellow-fleshed sweet potato.

ONIONS

IGNORING the inedible skin of the onion, the flesh can either be white, as is most common, or red.

In general, onions contain quercetin, the antioxidant which, among other things, is known for its ability to relieve hay fever, eczema, sinusitis and asthma.

They also contain high levels of allelic sulphides, which help fight cancer-causing agents.

Their colour difference is caused by varying levels of the colouring anthocyanin.

Healthiest colour? There is no difference.

PEPPERS

PACKED full of the compound capsaicin, peppers have antiinflammatory effects as well as helping to stimulate the digestion.

Green peppers have higher levels of folate, a form of vitamin B, which is necessary for the production and maintenance of new cells and often taken as a supplement during pregnancy.

Red peppers, however, are jampacked full of many other things, including the compound zeaxanthin, which helps maintain the health of the eyes, an increased amount of vitamin C and cryptoxanthin (which helps protect against lung cancer and rheumatoid arthritis).

Red peppers also have more than ten times the amount of carotene (vitamin A).

Healthiest colour? Red.

APPLES

WHILE all apples contain antioxidants, which help the body fight conditions such as breast cancer and heart disease, red-skinned apples contain considerably higher levels in the skin.

Higher levels of the antioxidant quercetin and the compound kaempferol have many health benefits, including protecting your body against ageing and even cancer.

Studies have shown an improved lung function and a lower risk of certain respiratory diseases (such as asthma and bronchitis) in people who eat a lot of apples.

Apples also contain vitamin C - although half of that is contained in the peel and the core.

Healthiest colour? Red.

GRAPEFRUIT

A PINK grapefruit contains 40 times more carotene (converted into vitamin A) than a normal grapefruit and is much sweeter.

They also have more lycopene, a potent antioxidant.

Studies suggest that consumption of foods rich in this is associated with a lower risk of prostate cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Ongoing research also indicates that lycopene is associated with reduced risk of macular degenerative disease (eye disease) and cancers of the lung, bladder, cervix and skin.

Grapefruits in general are full of vitamin C.

Healthiest colour? Pink.

ORANGES

KNOWN to be a good source of vitamin C, oranges also contain lutein (which is good for eyesight) and cryptoxanthin (protects against various cancers).

However, blood oranges do have some additional health benefits.

Not only do they contain nearly four times the level of carotene which - when converted by the body into vitamin A - helps to increase resistance to infection and is used to maintain a healthy sperm count in males and fertility in females, but blood oranges also have higher levels of the antioxidant lycopene.

Healthiest colour? Blood red.

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