

Which Berries Are Best?

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- › One of the most game-changing properties of berries is their antioxidant power, which keeps free radicals in check and fights inflammation
- › Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, cranberries and blackberries are known as some of the world's best dietary sources of bioactive compounds, such as anthocyanins, flavonols, ellagic acid and resveratrol
- › Reduced neurodegenerative oxidative stress, inflammation, diabetes, cancer, macular degeneration and improved cardiovascular function are several of the many benefits berries provide
- › Goji berries are linked to longevity, strength, mood and sexual vigor; bilberries are known for their effectiveness against diabetes; and acai berries contain 19 amino acids and fatty acids, making them neuroprotective and good for your heart

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What would the world be like without the fresh, delicious flavors, colors and textures that berries provide to your diet? More specifically, what would it be like if berries tasted good but didn't provide all the nutrients they do? Chances are we wouldn't be as healthy. Surprisingly, many of their health benefits come as a package deal with their flavors and vibrant colors.¹

Berries are loaded with vitamins, minerals and micronutrients that impart a host of health advantages. Some of the berries themselves are relatively unfamiliar in the North

American landscape.

All berries contain similar amounts of vitamin C, but a single cup of strawberries has 150% of the Dietary Reference Intake (RDI).² Additionally, berries are relatively low in calories; one cup of strawberries contains 49 calories, while blueberries have 84.³

Nearly anyone can eat berries in moderation, including those on a vegetarian, vegan, paleo or [Mediterranean diet](#), provided it's actually fresh fruit with no additives such as sugar, and you pay attention to the fructose amounts you're ingesting.

Super Antioxidant Power in Berries

One of the most game-changing properties of berries is their antioxidant power, which keep free radicals in check and fights inflammation.⁴ Authority Nutrition explains:⁵

"Free radicals are unstable molecules that occur as a normal byproduct of metabolism. It's important to have a small amount of free radicals in your body to defend against bacteria and viruses.

However, free radicals can also damage your cells when present in excessive amounts. Antioxidants can neutralize these compounds."

One study identified nutritional stress as one of the most significant negatives in terms of your health. The lack or complete absence of some nutrients depends on several factors, but it will definitely influence your physiological condition.

The damaging effects of insufficient nutrients involve your adrenal gland function and increase the release of catecholamines in your blood with a simultaneous inhibition of insulin production in your pancreas.⁶ Catecholamines are neurotransmitters such as epinephrine and dopamine, which affect the nervous system.⁷

Some of the most important antioxidants in berries are anthocyanins, flavonols, ellagic acid and resveratrol, which protect your cells and fight off disease. [Blueberries](#),

strawberries, raspberries, cranberries and blackberries, for instance, are known as some of the world's best dietary sources of bioactive compounds (BAC).⁸

These antioxidant compounds are heart-protective when you eat them in beneficial amounts, and can alleviate and prevent various diseases and disorders such as neurodegeneration, diabetes, inflammation and even cancer.⁹

Black, Red and Blue Berries Fight Oxidative Stress

Strawberries, blueberries and blackberries have been tapped for their ability to lower **oxidative stress**, which News Medical calls "an imbalance between the production of free radicals and the ability of the body to counteract or detoxify their harmful effects through neutralization by antioxidants."¹⁰ One study says:¹¹

"Oxidative stress is a normal phenomenon in the body ... (which) can also be viewed as an imbalance between the pro-oxidants and antioxidants in the body ... The harmful effect of free ROS (reactive oxygen species) and RNS (reactive nitrogen species) radicals causing potential biological damage is termed oxidative stress ...

The primitive steps in development of cancer, mutation and ageing are the result of oxidative damage to the DNA in a cell. A list of oxidized DNA products has been identified currently which can lead to mutation and cancer."

Another study indicated that blueberries, blackberries and raspberries exert the most antioxidant energy of the most common fruits, with the exception of **pomegranates**.¹² Further, blueberries are an example of a food that contains antioxidants associated with **cognitive improvement**, along with reductions in neurodegenerative oxidative stress.

One study in Italy revealed that about 2 cups of blueberries protect against DNA damage. Ten young volunteers were given that amount of blueberries (or a "placebo" of sorts). Blood tests done before and afterward were evaluated, and the blueberry group showed significantly reduced DNA damage within one hour.¹³

In another review, 31 healthy people ate about the same amount of strawberry purée daily for 30 days, and their oxidants and antioxidants leveled out. One pro-oxidant marker was reduced by 38%.¹⁴

Berries Have Multiple Benefits for Your Whole Body

There are numerous advantages to eating berries, as clinical studies demonstrate:

- **They improve your blood sugar and insulin response**, even with high-carb foods. One study involved females who ate bread (refined carbs cause high glucose and insulin responses) with strawberries, **bilberries** or lingonberries, versus raspberries, cloudberry or chokeberries, resulting in a 24% to 26% drop in insulin levels.¹⁵
- **Berries come with lots of fiber**, including **insoluble fiber**, which slows the rate at which food moves through your colon and in turn diminishes hunger. This decreases calorie intake¹⁶ and lets you absorb up to 130 fewer calories per day.¹⁷
- **They're potentially therapeutic for your skin**, reducing wrinkles and skin damage from free radicals¹⁸ (particularly ellagic acid), and blocking the production of enzymes that break down collagen.¹⁹
- **Berries protect against cancer**, due to their anthocyanin, ellagic acid and resveratrol²⁰ content. Studies showed raspberries to have a positive effect on **colon cancer** patients, and strawberries to have beneficial effects against liver cancer cells.²¹
- **Better heart health and artery function** are additional benefits. Endothelial cells, which line your blood vessels, control blood pressure and prevent blood from clotting. Inflammation damage them, but berries were shown to improve endothelial function in healthy and unhealthy patients.²²

Cranberries, acai berries, raspberries, strawberries, blackberries and blueberries are the ones identified as being the healthiest for women's hearts, in particular, as they contain high amounts of polyphenols, flavonoids and anthocyanins.²³

Less Familiar Berries Also Have Benefits

There are arguably hundreds of varieties of berries throughout the world, and the majority have amazing health benefits, as shown below:

Tart and full of flavor, tiny maqui berries are found growing wild in southern Chile. They have been used for millennia therapeutically, mostly to combat inflammation, which modern studies have supported.²⁴ They're noted for containing anthocyanins and polyphenols, as well as vitamin C, iron, calcium and potassium.

Tangy camu camu berries, the size of large grapes, are grown on a bush in the Amazon. They're known for fighting colds and flu due to their plentiful vitamin C content; reportedly as much as 60 times more than an orange.²⁵ Studies show they're good for your eyes, skin, gums and brain function, and have multiple other benefits.

Goldenberries are named for their color and usually come in the dried variety rather than fresh in the U.S. They're known for being filling, making you eat less, and regulating your metabolism. Rich in fiber as well as protein and B vitamins, they also contain lots of anti-inflammatory antioxidants.²⁶

Besides being associated with cardiovascular health,²⁷ **acai berries** from the Amazon rainforest have 10 times the antioxidant vitamins as grapes and twice that of blueberries.

Acerola cherries are found in regions such as South America, Southern Mexico and Asia. They contain high amounts of vitamin C – nine times the amount found in an orange and more than any other food source. They're low-calorie and contain high amounts of beta-carotene and flavonoids when they remain intact.²⁸

Pacific Island noni berries have a long history of traditional medical uses, from urinary tract infections to menstrual cramps and diabetes to liver disease. It contains vitamins C, B3 (niacin) and A, calcium, iron and potassium.

Boysenberries, a cross between a blackberry and a raspberry or loganberry, have their own set of nutritional advantages. While they have a fair amount of carbohydrates in every 1-cup serving, they're loaded with fiber, minerals, vitamins and 2.5 grams of protein.²⁹

Reports have put acai berries in the superfood category, as they too, are rich in anthocyanins, and are known for having high antioxidant activity and cell-protective qualities.³⁰ They also contain 19 amino acids and fatty acids making them neuroprotective and good for your heart.³¹

Bilberries are smaller than blueberries but are otherwise similar, and they contain impressive amounts of antioxidant anthocyanins. They're known for their ability to fight diabetes³² and enhance night vision, as well as protect your vision and even improve symptoms of cataracts and [macular degeneration](#).³³

The aronia, aka black chokeberry, is native to the eastern U.S., as well as Europe. About the size of a large blueberry, it contains five times the amount of flavonoids and [anthocyanins](#) compared to cranberry juice, with action related to cervical tumor cells.³⁴ While aronia is not palatable due to its bitter flavor (hence the pseudonym), it's popular as a tea and dessert ingredient nonetheless.

Bright red goji berries (aka wolf berries) are grown in Nepal and Tibet and have had a long run in traditional medicinal therapies linked to longevity, strength, mood and sexual vigor. Studies show [goji berries](#) are beneficial for diabetes, heart-protective, improve sexual function and benefit both your brain and vision.³⁵

Gooseberries, known for their puckery-sour taste, were a favorite for the tart pies your grandmother used to make. Visually unlike most other berries, with their translucent skin and ribbed flesh, gooseberries contain lots of fiber, potassium and 70% of the vitamin C you need in one day. One study found them to be useful in cancer treatment and prevention.³⁶

Keep in Mind the Fructose Contained in Berries

Fruits are advantageous for your health, but it's important to bear in mind that excess amounts of fructose are anything but good for you. The health benefits are available only when it's the whole fruit (even if it's pureed) and nothing but the fruit. It should go without saying, but canned varieties and snacks such as fruit roll-ups are more often than not laced with loads of sugar, or even worse, high-fructose corn syrup.

Check food labels to make sure you're not bringing a toxic substance into your home for your family to consume. Whenever possible, **choose organic**, whether you're buying berries or other fruits and vegetables.

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