

Finding the Fountain of Youth

By Allison Tannis, BSc., MSc.

Thousands seek it. Only a few have discovered it. Yet, it is available to the masses. Fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants. These little free radical scavengers just may be our fountain of youth as they possess many positive effects on the body. The things you did not know about fruits and vegetables may surprise you.

About 40% of people fail to eat five to ten servings of fruits and vegetables per day according to the V8® Survey, 2003. Of interest, the survey also found that 60% of Canadians are planning to eat more fruits and vegetables. Perhaps they know some of these lesser known facts about vegetables and fruit.

Did you know that fruits can promote muscle recovery after a workout? Researchers from Pennsylvania State University reported in 1998 that antioxidants from fruits can promote muscle recovery. Muscle strength and length tend to reduce with age. Antioxidants in fruits can help prevent this muscle loss, which is useful for both athletes and any who seek a wrinkle rescue.

With age humans also notice degradation of the neuronal system as seen with age related dementia such as Alzheimer's. In 1999, the Journal of Neuroscience reported that supplementation with antioxidant rich foods, like fruits and vegetables may reverse the course of neuronal and behavioural aging. Antioxidants are thought to prevent free radical damage in the brain thereby preventing damage that occurs naturally with age. Perhaps, the carrot eater truly is the wiser.

In Carcinogenesis, Thompson et al. 1999 published a study that illustrated the cancer preventing potential of fruits and vegetables. This and many other scientific studies have made convincing arguments that fruits and vegetables do in fact play a role in the prevention of cancer. The argument is so convincing that both Canada and the United States have health claims stating so. In Canada, "a diet rich and vegetables and fruit may be associated with a reduced risk of some types of cancer." In the United States, "low fat diets rich in fruits and vegetables may reduce the risk of some types of cancer, a disease associated with many factors." These health claims can be found on food products that contain fruits and vegetables.

Therefore, eating fruits and vegetables may truly be our fountain of youth as they promote muscle recovery, reduce neuronal aging and reduce the risk of cancer. However, despite these facts many Canadians do not eat the recommended 5 to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Excuses range from a lack of knowledge of how to prepare them, to blaming the lack of carrot sticks and apples on menus of fast food restaurants.

Regardless, our lack of consumption of fruits and vegetables may arguably be blamed as a key factor to the many health problems we face today. How do we increase the Canadian consumption of fruits and vegetables? A study in the Public Health Nutrition Journal of Denmark earlier this year noted that by simply offering attractive vegetable and fruit options on the canteen lunch menu there was a significant increase in total fruit and vegetable consumption.

Our fountain of youth is not hiding in secret caverns in the desert. It is not visible to the naked eye but, antioxidants truly hold the power of health. Share the wealth of knowledge. Eat more fruits and vegetables, and enjoy health.

*Allison Tannis, BSc., MSc. is a nutritional educator and author of **Vitality: Quest for a healthy diet**. Visit www.allisontannis.com for more information, articles and upcoming appearances.*