

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Big Antioxidant Numbers – So What?

If you've been reading this column for awhile you've seen more than one article suggesting that all the hype for the newest, latest, best, healthiest miracle fruit ready to save your life, your vision, your memory or cure whatever else ails you probably is no better than a bunch of grapes or a bowl of spinach salad. All those claims are based on how much antioxidants the fruit being advertised is supposed to have.

Don't get me wrong, antioxidants are good for us. But there are dozens if not hundreds of different antioxidants. There are lots of ways to measure them, in test tubes or by machines. But there are dozens of problems with those measurements too. For example, one test might be measuring 1, 2, 10 or more different compounds and reporting it as one number. A test might work very well in one fruit and not at all in another fruit, even though they both have the same antioxidants. But the machine might be able to read the results in a yellow fruit but not a purple one.

Because the tests are different it is hard if not impossible to compare them to each other. When a fruit is divided into several sections and each section is tested by a different method, you'd expect to get similar results from each section, wouldn't you? If you measured a picture frame with a yard stick, a sewing measuring tape and a carpenter's tape, the numbers would all be the same. But that doesn't happen with these tests. You can't take a number from one test to predict the number from another.

Worst of all, there's no way to say what numbers from a test tube mean in our

bodies. An antioxidant in a fruit might be destroyed by the acid in our stomachs. It might get through the stomach but never get to the brain. Drying or powdering the fruit to put it into a pill could destroy the antioxidant. Extracting it could change it so that when we pop the capsule in our mouth there's no active ingredients left. Or maybe when the manufacturer used the oil, alcohol or even water to extract it the active ingredient was left behind in the pulp.

So far medical research hasn't found any benefits to match high antioxidant levels as measured by these tests for your urine, skin or blood. Yes, you may have lots of antioxidants in your urine. But did they get to your brain, eyes, or skin? Are what that test measured in your urine the kinds of antioxidants that will really help? Up till now the tests can't tell us. Is there too much there? Might they be harmful? That might be true too.

How much do we need to protect ourselves? That's the other big question around all these tests. What number is enough for humans? What works on cancer cells in a glass plate in the lab doesn't translate easily onto your dinner plate. We can force feed huge amounts of one compound to mice or rabbits in the lab to get results. But we have a hard time even staying on a grapefruit diet for a month. And thank goodness for that, because really imbalanced diets are not healthy for us.

What this all means is that most of the advertising claims for huge antioxidant numbers are just that – advertising. The number might be what came out of the test machine, so it's 'true'. But it has little or no meaning for what's going on in your body.

The University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter recently had an article about antioxidant claims. The most common number used on foods and supplements is

the ORAC, which is a real laboratory test. But the newsletter suggests that the meaning of ORAC might better be described as the Over-Rated Antioxidant Claims test!

If you're eating a balanced diet with lots of colorful fruits and vegetables plus whole grains, you'll be getting a wide variety of antioxidants along with the vitamins, minerals and other nutrients you need for them to work well in your body. Ignore the ads. Put a rainbow on your plate, you're much more likely to find golden health at the end.

Here's a main dish salad loaded with antioxidants and other nutrients. Enjoy!

Sweet and Sour Slaw with Chicken or Shrimp

1 large bag coleslaw mix ready to eat 1 cup fresh sugar peas, trimmed

¼ cup raspberry or strawberry all fruit jam 2 Tbsp canola or safflower oil

4 tsp cider vinegar 1 red apple, cored and chopped

12 oz shredded cooked chicken breast or shelled, steamed shrimp.

In large bowl combine cabbage slaw, pea pods and chicken or shrimp. In small bowl whisk jam, oil and vinegar together. Add apple, toss to coat. Add apple and dressing to coleslaw mixture, toss to coat. Serve immediately or chill for several hours. Serves 4-6.