

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Seeing Red in Supplements

Other than the high cost of supplements, there's a new red (or pink) on the supplement shelves these days. Have you been hearing about all the supposed benefits of *astaxanthin* yet? Despite its chemical-sounding name, astaxanthin is really quite natural and fairly common. It's the pigment that makes pink salmon pink, lobsters turn red and roseate spoonbills rosy. Now it's being promoted as a health food supplement for people too. Is it worth the price?

Astaxanthin is a chemical in the same family as carotene, the stuff that makes carrots orange. But unlike carotene we are not able to convert it into vitamin A. Not many animals, including ourselves, are able to produce this chemical. Cardinals, those bright red birds with black faces in our yards, are one of the few birds that can make at least some of it from their foods. Most pink birds and fish with pink flesh get it by eating algae or other tiny marine animals that can make it. If we eat too much of it, from too many supplements, our skin can start to turn orange-y or yellowish too.

So why are we being told that we should be buying this stuff, at not-cheap prices? As with so many other supplements, there is a grain of truth behind the tons of advertising. It is an antioxidant. It might be able to protect us from the effects of free radicals, might help our immune systems protect us from bacterial or virus invaders. There are claims that it will lower our bad cholesterol and triglycerides, protect our brains from dementia, save us from cancer, cure our arthritic joints and probably heal another hundred or so illnesses and diseases.

Unfortunately, the grain of truth in that ton of claims is lost when you look at where it comes from. The great majority of these claims' bit of truth comes from studies that were done in test tubes, or fish, or rats, mice or rabbits. Very, very few of them have been done in people. The couple that did feed people astaxantin used very few people for short times. Just a few of them have been published in medical journals. Most are hidden behind promoters' company doors. That does nothing to convince doctors that it really works.

In addition, the little bit of research that has been published doesn't agree. Some studies found that it really helped; some found it did no good at all. We should remember the beta-carotene and vitamin E studies some years ago. They are natural antioxidants too. There were high hopes that they would be able to stop cancers and cure illnesses. Pills were flying off the shelves. Then they did the big studies and discovered that people taking them as supplements were *more* likely, not less, to get some kinds of cancers. The big studies with lots of different kinds of people have not been done for astaxanthin yet.

If that's not enough to make us stop and think, consider the cost. To get as much purified astaxanthin in pills as some of the research claims it used, internet sales locations are asking \$30 or more for a month's worth. That could buy a lot of canned salmon. The salmon would have a better balance of many vitamins, minerals, healthy omega-3 fats as well as great protein. And you won't turn orange or have red feces after eating salmon. A few other side effects that have been reported from purified astaxanthin supplements include reduced calcium levels in blood, extra hair growing

where it normally does not, and several reactions or interactions with medications. It's not worth the money or the risk now.

If you think you'd like more astaxanthin go for red or pink salmon. Here's a dip to try at your next football tailgate or TV game party. Shape it into a fish shape instead of a ball for some extra pizzazz. Enjoy!

Smoky Salmon Cheese Ball

2- 6 oz cans pink salmon, drained	8 oz low fat cream cheese
2 Tbsp finely minced onion	1 Tbsp parsley flakes
1 Tbsp lemon juice	$\frac{3}{4}$ tsp celery salt
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp liquid smoke	$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp garlic powder
$\frac{1}{2}$ C finely chopped pecans	2 Tbsp minced fresh parsley

Discard skin from salmon. Mash any bones. Combine salmon, cheese, onion, parsley flakes, lemon juice, celery salt, liquid smoke and garlic powder in bowl and mix well. Cover and chill at least 1 hour. Shape into ball or fish shape on serving dish. Pat chopped pecans into surface and sprinkle fresh parsley over and around it. Serve with assorted crackers. Makes 12 servings of 1 oz each.