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### Does Fruit Have to Be Exotic to Be Good?

A look at the beverage aisle these days might make you wonder what country you are in! There are drinks with acai fruit, pomegranate juice, goji berry, noni juice, mangosteens and more. Where did they come from, and are they really better than our home grown cherries, grapes, blueberries and cranberries?

Acai is from Brazil. It has minerals, vitamin E and surprisingly, a lot of unsaturated fat. There's a little evidence the antioxidants might be useful. But since it doesn't travel well, you're only likely to find juice, no whole fruit. Goji berries come from China. A relative of our tomatoes and potatoes, they have fiber and minerals. Their bright red color comes from beta-carotene and other phytonutrients. Noni fruits also come from Asia. They are very low in phytonutrients but so high in potassium that people with kidney problems should be very careful about drinking noni juice. Mangosteens grow in Asia and Africa. They are very sweet but we only get significant amounts of phytonutrients from them if the producers concentrate the skins. Most of these are difficult to transport, so we usually get juice or frozen pulp, not fresh fruits.

Are they nutritious? Yes, they do have some nutritional benefit. Do they really live up to the advertising hype around them? At this point all we have as 'proof' are stories. A few people might say that Fruit X really helped them. With the genetic variety we have in this country, the ethnic, dietary and exercise varieties we have, any fruit might help a few people. But there have been no studies big enough to show that Fruit X will really make a significant difference in health for most people.

On the other hand, there is good evidence that cranberries do help prevent urinary tract

infections. Grapes and cherries are known to have phytonutrients that do help maintain good vision, reduce inflammation and lower our risks of various diseases. Plus we can get our local fruits fresh and whole. Transporting and processing exotics costs a lot of money and gas.

So if you're in need of some new variety or flavor in your diet, go ahead and try an exotic. But don't think they are essential to good health. Don't expect them to instantly improve your life or health. A wide variety of local fruits, in a wide variety of colors, will give you plenty of nutrition and an range of healthful phytonutrients to keep you going strong. Sweet cherries are fresh in the stores now, have some!

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