

House Calls

By Rosemary Carstens

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Q: Do apples really protect against lung cancer and heart disease? Is apple juice as beneficial as a daily whole fruit?

A: Yes and no. Whole apples are a nutritional bonanza and eating 5 or more per week has been positively associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, asthma, cancer, neurodegenerative disorders, and type II diabetes, as well as with increased lung function, improved intestinal tract difficulties, and UV-B protection. Apples are chock full of fiber, flavonoids such as the phytochemical Quercetin (which pack a powerful antioxidant punch), pectins, tannins, and vitamins.

This bountiful cornucopia unites in a powerful multiplier to reduce risk of heart attack and stroke, and prevent free radical damage. Studies show that foods high in Quercetin (such as apples and onions) work to cut lung cancer incidence. Unfortunately, the full strength of the apple's healthy natural synergy does not hold true for apple juice. Juicing greatly dilutes phytochemical content and fiber, and minimizes the fruit's benefits.

As scientists attempt to unlock the apple's chemical secrets, exciting new connections are revealed. Recently, Dr. Chang Lee, of Cornell university's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, stated that an apple a day "not only may help reduce the risk of cancer, as previous studies have shown, but also may supply major bioactive compounds, which play an important role in reducing the risk of neurodegenerative disorders."

Besides being a crisp, crunchy, delicious treat, there is still a great deal to be discovered about the mighty apple—but so far, the apple comes out smelling like a rose!

Q: Can lutein really protect against macular degeneration? What foods are highest in this antioxidant?

A: Remarkable strides have been made in determining the importance of lutein in the diet. It has been shown to be effective in reducing risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and a recent study at the North Chicago VA Medical Center indicates that lutein supplementation may *reverse* its symptoms. Because one in eight Americans over the age of 60 has this previously untreatable disease, these findings are extremely promising.

Scientists have found lutein probably works best in naturally occurring combinations of bioactive substances called phytonutrients, so although supplements are helpful, eating foods highest in lutein give you the most bang for your health.

“Add dark greens into your diet regularly,” suggests Greg Hottinger, nutritionist for the Duke University Center for Integrative Medicine, “particularly spinach, kale, collards, and turnip greens, because they are among the most concentrated natural sources of lutein.” Eggs and avocados are also excellent choices.

Q: I am considering using cocoa shell mulch in my garden, but I’ve read recently it can be hazardous to dogs. Is this true?

A: Caution is certainly called for. According to a study by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, some dogs find cocoa shell mulch tasty—but it contains theobromine, which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, and kidney problems in dogs. Eating a large amount of it can result in death. This mulch is a by-product of chocolate production and has become popular because it looks good, smells delectable, and degrades into an organic fertilizer. However, if you have a dog, you may want to consider an alternative.

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