

## Antioxidant Vitamins

Did you know that cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death for African-American men and women? This disease claims the lives of over 100,000 annually. Perhaps due to this alarming number, many of the scientific researches recently conducted in the US have been focused on how antioxidant vitamins may reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Studies have shown that antioxidant vitamins, such as vitamin E, vitamin C, and beta carotene (a form of vitamin A), have potential health-promoting properties. The data on antioxidant vitamins is incomplete, but up to 30 percent of Americans are already taking some form of antioxidant vitamin supplement along with their diet.

Due to the lack of sufficient data to support the success of antioxidant supplements versus cardiovascular and other degenerative illnesses, the American Heart Association does not yet recommend using antioxidant vitamins supplements. That does not mean, however, that we should cut back on our intake of antioxidants.

Some of the basic food groups that prove to be rich sources of antioxidant vitamins are the following:

- \* Breads, cereals, pasta, and starchy vegetables (such as potatoes, yam, squash, etc.)
- \* Fruits and vegetables
- \* Fat-free milk and low-fat dairy products
- \* Lean meat, fish, and poultry

Eating these foods not only allows you to ingest a high level of natural antioxidant vitamins, but keeps you from gaining weight. Eating a variety of foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol provides a rich natural source of antioxidant vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

But what exactly do antioxidant vitamins do?

Because we live in an atmosphere that contains oxygen, oxygen radicals are everywhere. Oxidation is a process that occurs naturally in the body. A natural consequence of it are the radical particles that have been dubbed "free radicals."

Scientists point to these so-called free radicals as the culprits when it comes to most degenerative diseases. Free radicals are blamed for even the simplest of illnesses, such as colds. There is an increasing body of evidence that oxidative stress is linked to many diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, neurological disorders, cataracts, and arthritis. Our strongest defenses against these harmful free radicals are antioxidant vitamins which are contained in the foods that we eat.