

## **What Role do Antioxidants Have in Preventing Heart Disease?**

Antioxidants are natural substances or nutrients found in our food that are believed to help prevent oxidative damage to our body. When our cells use oxygen on a daily basis, they naturally produce byproducts known as “free radicals” which travel throughout the body harming cells. Antioxidants help slow down this process by acting as “free radical scavengers,” preventing the damage caused by these free radicals. Without adequate amounts of antioxidants, oxidative damage can contribute to the development of coronary heart disease (CHD). Antioxidants also have a role in enhancing the immune system and decreasing the risk of infections and cancer.

### **What exactly does this mean for me?**

Studies on the development of atherosclerosis (cholesterol build-up in arteries resulting in decreased blood flow to the heart) suggest that a higher intake of some antioxidants may offer protection. There are some evidence associating high dietary intake of antioxidants (from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains) to a reduced risk of CHD, However, more controlled clinical trials are need.

These are few antioxidants:

- **Vitamin E**
- **Beta Carotene**
- **Antioxidant Rich Foods:** whole grains, citric fruits, and green vegetables are associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. In addition, foods such as purple grapes, blueberries, and red wine may also contain flavonoids and lycopenes (nutrients not found in vitamin supplements) which may also be protective.

### **What are the current recommendations?**

The current recommendation from the American Heart Association’s nutrition committee is to eat a balanced diet with plenty of antioxidant-rich fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

**Prevention is the key:** These are few steps you can take to reduce your risk factors include maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, quitting smoking, controlling blood pressure and diabetes, eating foods low in fat, lowering cholesterol, and managing stress.

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