

NUTRITION HORIZON

Eating Berries May Lower Risk of Parkinson's Disease

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2/14/2011 --- New research shows men and women who regularly eat berries may have a lower risk of developing Parkinson's disease, while men may also further lower their risk by regularly eating apples, oranges and other sources rich in dietary components called flavonoids. The study was released and will be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 63rd Annual Meeting in Honolulu April 9 to April 16, 2011.

Flavonoids are found in plants and fruits and are also known collectively as vitamin P and citrin. They can also be found in berry fruits, chocolate, and citrus fruits such as grapefruit.

The study involved 49,281 men and 80,336 women. Researchers gave participants questionnaires and used a database to calculate intake amount of flavonoids. They then analyzed the association between flavonoid intakes and risk of developing Parkinson's disease. They also analyzed consumption of five major sources of foods rich in flavonoids: tea, berries, apples, red wine and oranges or orange juice. The participants were followed for 20 to 22 years.

During that time, 805 people developed Parkinson's disease. In men, the top 20 percent who consumed the most flavonoids were about 40 percent less likely to develop Parkinson's disease than the bottom 20 percent of male participants who consumed the least amount of flavonoids. In women, there was no relationship between overall flavonoid consumption and developing Parkinson's disease. However, when sub-classes of flavonoids were examined, regular consumption of anthocyanins, which are mainly obtained from berries, were found to be associated with a lower risk of Parkinson's disease in both men and women.

"This is the first study in humans to examine the association between flavonoids and risk of developing Parkinson's disease," said study author Xiang Gao, MD, PhD, with the Harvard School of Public Health in Boston. "Our findings suggest that flavonoids, specifically a group called anthocyanins, may have neuroprotective effects. If confirmed, flavonoids may be a natural and healthy way to reduce your risk of developing Parkinson's disease."