

[IMAGE]

Eat Your Fruits and Veggies!

By Editorial Staff

What's the best reason to eat your fruits and vegetables? They may help you live longer, pure and simple. According to a study published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, consumption of fruits and vegetables containing alpha-carotene - an antioxidant carotenoid found in many red, yellow and orange fruits and vegetables, as well as some green ones - may help defend cells from attack.

Researchers discovered that people with higher blood levels of alpha-carotene were less likely to suffer serious illness (particularly cancer and cardiovascular disease) and death over the 14-year study period compared with people whose blood levels of alpha-carotene were lower. The study evaluated 15,318 U.S. adults ages 20 and older as part of the Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey Follow-Up Study.

If you're not familiar with alpha-carotene, perhaps its antioxidant cousin rings a bell: beta-carotene, known for its presence in carrots, among other fruits and vegetables. Both alpha- and beta-carotene are converted to vitamin A by the body. While the study authors do not know precisely why alpha-carotene may help protect against disease or if it acts in conjunction with other nutrients, they emphasize that their findings were not attributable to participants' lifestyle habits, health risk factors or demographic characteristics.

The message is clear: Eat your fruits and veggies! Ample evidence supports their value in lowering disease risk. Whether packed with alpha- or beta-carotene, B vitamins, vitamin D, zinc, selenium, magnesium or any of a host of other nutrients, fruits and vegetables provide the nutrition your body needs.

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