Berry Brouhaha

Does acai boost your health—or just bust your budget?

October 1, 2009 By Kat Noel

Everywhere you turn—from television to magazines to your e-mail inbox—ads and testimonials tout the antioxidant potency of acai (pronounced ah-sigh-ee) in the form of juice, powder and pills. (Although no human trials have ever established the health benefits of antioxidants, chemical analysis shows that they should help repair cellular damage caused by harmful molecules.) Acai's claims go much further, promising that the grape-size, black-purple fruit of South and Central America's acai palm trees will melt away the pounds, improve your immune system, boost your sex life and even prevent cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

To see whether there's any juice to these assertions, *POZ* turned to Edwin Krales, MS, an HIV/AIDS nutritionist, health educator and coordinator of food and nutrition at the Momentum Project of Village Care in New York City.

Save your money, Krales says, because the acai craze is fueled by economics, not actual health benefits. "These companies are in business to make money," he says, "so they sell the buzz rather than the science."

Krales calls whole fruits and vegetables a much better source of antioxidants than any supplement or juice. He also warns that many juices contain considerable amounts of simple syrup, which can contribute to obesity. Juice also lacks the good fiber furnished by whole fruit.

It's all a reminder that here in the real world, there are no superfoods, only well balanced, healthful diets heavy on fruits, veggies and grains and light on red meat, sugar, salt and fats. And that fruits and veggies don't have to be exotic to be healthful.

Krales offers this recipe for health and weight loss: "Get away from junk food, cut down on fat and go to a plant-based diet, with some meat and fish. Then," he says, "you will make huge strides—and that's true [for people] with HIV as well as [for those with] many other illnesses."

JUICE BOX

One study compared acai juice with other cold drinks reputed to havehigh antioxidant levels. Here's the ranking, from highest to lowestantioxidant content:

1. pomegranate juice
2. red wine
3. Concord grape juice
4. blueberry juice
5. black cherry juice
6. acai juice
7. cranberry juice
8. orange juice
9.iced tea
10.apple juice

EVERYDAY CELL PROTECTION

Want to include more antioxidants in your diet? Look no further than these inexpensive, common foods that might already grace your grocery list.

- red kidney beans top the list, but pintos and black beans carry high levels of antioxidants too.
- blueberries and strawberries
- baked Russet and sweet potatoes
- Red Delicious, Granny Smith and Gala apples
- prunes and plums
- kale, red cabbage, beets and brussels sprouts

–Kellee Terrell

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http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/acai-antioxidants-hiv-17271-1800