



healthwatch

America's Premier Source for Health Information



February 2006

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

The #1 Superfood - the Acai Berry

Referred to in almost miraculous terms, the acai (ah-SAH'-ee) fruit (berry) has become known as one of the most nutritious and powerful foods in the world. It comes from a palm plant that is widely distributed in northern South America with its greatest occurrence and economic importance in Brazil.

The acai palm is described as being very ornamental, with multiple branches reaching up to 80 feet in height. It produces small deep purple, almost black, acai fruit berries that grow in groups of 3 – 8 per bunch.

Acai has recently been called "Superfood Number 1" by Dr. Nicholas Perricone, author of *The Perricone Promise: Look Younger, Live Longer in Three Easy Steps*. He has given acai this title because of the numerous outstanding health promoting properties inherent in the fruit. Major television networks are also bringing attention to acai. NBC's *Today Show* recently featured a report on this very potent fruit, calling it the "Viagra of the Amazon", touting it for helping with circulation, longevity and anti-aging. *People* magazine is asking the question, What is "The latest look-better, live-longer superfood?" and goes on to answer by talking about how acai is packed with antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and other nutrients.

Acai contains a remarkable concentration of antioxidants. In fact, it is probably one of the richest fruit sources known. This is key because the importance of antioxidants for health cannot be overstated due to their ability to mitigate damaging free radicals, slow down the aging process and protect against many diseases. The major source of antioxidants in acai is anthocyanins. Anthocyanins are the chemical components that give the intense color to many fruits and vegetables. These beneficial compounds are also found in red grapes which is why many doctors and health professionals recommend drinking red wine. The acai berry, however, contains as much as 33 times more anthocyanins than grapes.

Healthful fatty acids are also an exceptional feature of acai. The fatty acid component of this amazing fruit looks similar to olive oil, and is rich in monounsaturated oleic acid. Research shows that this fat has the potential to support the prevention of cardiovascular disease and cancer. It is also important in the regulation and balance of a variety of other mechanisms in the body. In acai fruit juice drinks, look for the nutritious fatty acids floating on the top. This is a sure sign of a good quality product. Also, get a organically grown source of acai whenever possible.

Modern science is beginning to recognize and validate the merits of acai. In fact, one recent scientific research study highlights the far reaching scope of this phenomenal fruit. The study showed that acai was able to destroy cultured human cancer cells. Specifically, four out of six different chemical extracts made from acai fruit pulp triggered a self-destruct response in up to 86 percent of leukemia cells tested. Stephen Talcott, researcher and assistant professor with the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agriculture Sciences cautioned that the study was not intended to prove that compounds found in acai could prevent leukemia in humans. However, he said that compounds which show good activity against cancer cells in a model system have the potential to have beneficial effects on the physical body. Talcott will be involved with another study, expected to conclude in 2006, to determine the effects of acai's antioxidant properties on healthy human subjects with respect to how acai compounds are absorbed into the blood system, and their affects on blood pressure, cholesterol and related health indicators.

In South America, where acai is grown, traditional preparations are used freely as a beverage. Natives of Brazil and Peru have long known the potent health-related benefits and nutraceutical properties of this extraordinary fruit. With modern science beginning to catch up in its understanding of the acai, we could be on the forefront of a major health promoting explosion.

Sources:

Journal Of Agriculture And Food Chemistry, 2004, Volume 52, pages 1539-1545
Journal Of Agriculture And Food Chemistry, Web Release Date: January 12, 2006 -
<http://pubs.acs.org/cgi-bin/abstract.cgi/jafcau/asap/abs/jf052132n.html>
Journal of The American College of Nutrition, 2005, Volume 24, pages 361-9
Nutrition Review, 2005, Volume 63, pages 374-86
http://www.plantapalm.com/vpe/photos/Species/euterpe_oleracea.htm
The Perricone Promise Look Younger, Live Longer in Three Easy Steps, pages 62-6