



# The Be Fit Minute

By Emily Gelsomin, RD, LDN



## AGE WELL WITH YOUR FORK IN HAND

Pollution, cigarette smoke, sun light, alcohol and radiation all expose your body to free radicals, which—along with inflammation—cause damage to cells, tissues and organs. Not having adequate antioxidants (disease-fighting chemicals) to fight off free radicals and inflammation can cause premature aging. Excessive inflammation can also put you at increased risk for chronic diseases, such as heart disease, Alzheimer's disease and cancer. Luckily, you can maximize your body's ability to fight aging by eating a diet high in antioxidants.

### Top 5 Ways To Fight Aging With Your Fork:

- 1. Get your antioxidants through food.** It's unknown if supplements provide the same benefits as the antioxidants naturally found in food. Supplements are also unregulated, expensive, and can interfere with medications: so go for food first, whenever possible. (See below for tips on how to increase your antioxidant intake.)
- 2. Limit your intake of added sugar.** Too much sugar in your diet may breakdown collagen and affect the elasticity of your skin.
- 3. Aim to eat at least 5 fruits and vegetables per day.** Studies show having a minimum of 5 servings per day can ward off disease and premature death. (Aim for a serving to be ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw.)
- 4. Be consistent.** A consistent intake of foods naturally high in antioxidants helps your body fight damage better than sporadic bouts.
- 5. Spice up your diet.** Add new foods and spices into your diet for variety. Start by incorporating some of the below foods, research has shown they help fight inflammation and protect against free radical damage.



**Turmeric:** Preliminary studies suggest a chemical found in turmeric—called curcumin—may have anti-inflammatory and anticancer properties; it may also aid in cognitive function, help lower bad cholesterol and reduce blood clots, though more research is needed. Curcumin is said to be more potent than vitamin E (a known antioxidant, see below) in fighting free radical damage.

→**Add it:** Also known as Indian saffron, turmeric imparts a bright yellow color to dishes. Add it to egg salad or tofu salad. It is also often used in Indian curries and works well in rice-based dishes, such as paella.

**Cinnamon:** May help activate antioxidants in the body. It may also enhance the body's ability to control blood sugar, though more research is needed. It also has antimicrobial properties and has been shown to fight against E. coli bacteria (in one study, 1 tsp killed 99% of the bacteria present in tainted apple juice).

→**Add it:** It works well in a variety of dessert or quick bread recipes. It also adds depth to savory dishes such as chili and baked beans. Or sprinkle it on oatmeal or yogurt with honey for breakfast.

**Cardamom:** Also has antioxidant properties. Antioxidants found in most spices are also heat stable, which means cooking won't lower the potency.

→**Add it:** Often sold in little green pods, add the pods whole to flavor soups or rice (take the pods out before serving). To grind the seeds, bash the pods with a rolling pin (or pestle) to release the seeds and then grind the seeds. Add ground seeds to rice pudding, pancake batter or banana bread. Cardamom is also found in many curries.

**Coriander:** Contains linalool, a phytochemical with antioxidant properties.

→**Add it:** Coriander is the seed of the cilantro plant. Add it to marinades, soups, dips and chili. Heat reduces its flavor, so add it towards the end of your cooking.

**Ginger:** Has a high antioxidant content and has been shown to inhibit inflammatory processes in the body.

→**Add it:** Use both fresh and dried ginger. Mince or grate fresh (peeled) ginger and toss with root vegetables (such as potatoes, carrots, or turnips) and roast them in the oven. Ginger also works well with chicken and salmon. You can even add it to apple and pear-based desserts. Unpeeled ginger keeps 2-4 months in the freezer; wrap it and place it in a ziplock bag.

**Vitamin E:** An antioxidant that works to protect cells from free radical damage. Vitamin E also helps to enhance your immune system. (Supplements may not offer the same protection and some studies have shown they may increase cancer risk.)

→**Add it:** Nuts and seeds are rich in vitamin E: about 25 almonds provides 40% of your daily requirement of vitamin E; 1 oz (a small handful) of sunflower seeds provides 30%; 2 tbsp peanut butter provides 15%. Spinach and kiwi are also good sources.

**Vitamin C:** Responsible for regenerating other antioxidants in the body, vitamin C also helps to limit free radical damage and thwart cancer-causing compounds.

→**Add it:** ½ of a red pepper or 1 kiwi or orange will meet your vitamin C need for the day; ½ cup strawberries, broccoli or cantaloupe will provide 50% of your daily need or more. Vitamin C is reduced through cooking, especially boiling; consume fruits and vegetables raw or lightly steamed to help preserve their vitamin C content.