

# THE ANTIOXIDANTS

Imagine for a moment that you are a human body cell lining the inside of a blood vessel. Quietly, you lie there with all your cellular machines working in unison to do the job for which you are designed, and then BAM! An unfriendly particle spins violently into your side, creating a gaping crater in your protective covering.

It's time for the Antioxidant Army. Unfriendly particles inside the body include substances called free radicals that consist of highly reactive molecule with a unbalanced chemical makeup. They damage cell membranes, cell proteins and genetic material as they seek out electrons to stabilize themselves.

Unfortunately, free radicals become stable by stealing electrons form healthy cells, and in doing so significantly damage these previously normal cells.

Free radicals are naturally formed in the energy-producing pathways of the body. For an athlete, exercise increases the use of energy pathways. Therefore, formation of free radicals also increases.

It is estimated that 4 to 5 percent of oxygen flowing through the energy pathways forms free radicals.

Other factors that contribute to a rise in free-radical invasion include smoking, pollution and exposure to chemicals and radiation, so well as aging and the normal processes of defending against harmful microorganisms that invade that body.

However, do not worry. The antioxidant army can stand up to the challenge.

The army marching to your defense includes antioxidants that the body manufactures plus micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) from your diet. Fortunately, research indicated that exercise enhance the body's natural production of antioxidants, However, it is not fully known whether or not this rise keeps pace with increased free radicals formed during exercise, Therefore, athletes need to consume an antioxidant rich diet.

Foods to eat:

Blueberries, Blackberries, cherries, lemons, strawberries, raspberries, grapefruit, lime and oranges, peanut butter, leafy greens, fresh veggies, sweet potatoes, olive oil, garlic, squash, beef, onions nuts, raisins, carrots.