

Flavonoids may be 'important to promoting broad health and wellbeing in aging': Harvard study

By Stephen DANIELLS, 03-Nov-2014

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Higher intakes of flavonoid compounds in the diet during middle age may boost healthy aging in women, according to data from 1,517 women from the Nurses' Health Study.

Women with the highest average intakes of flavones, flavanones, anthocyanins, and flavonols had the greatest odds of healthy aging, defined as "no major chronic diseases or major impairments in cognitive or physical function or mental health".

The findings were further substantiated by consistent data from flavonoid-rich foods, including oranges, berries, onions, and apples, said scientists from Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School, the French National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM) and the University of Bordeaux, and Harvard School of Public Health.

"Flavonoids may contribute to reducing chronic diseases and maintaining physical, cognitive, and mental health with aging via their potential to decrease oxidative stress and inflammation, which are 2 general pathways underlying many age-related chronic diseases and health conditions," they wrote in the [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#).

Study details

Led by Cécilia Samieri, the researchers analyzed data from 13,818 women in their late 50s at the start of the study (1984–1986). The women had no chronic diseases at the start of the study, and were followed for an average of 15 years.

Data obtained using food-frequency questionnaires indicated that 1,517 women survived into their 70s and met the criteria for 'healthy aging'. Results indicated that women with the highest average intakes of flavones, flavanones, anthocyanins, and flavonols had significantly greater odds of healthy aging. Specifically, flavones, flavanones, anthocyanins, and flavonols increased the odds of healthy aging by 32%, 28%, 25%, and 18%, respectively.

The potential healthy aging potential of flavonoids appears to have biological plausibility, with data from a range of different studies supporting the potential antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties of the compounds, their ability to improve glucose metabolism and insulin resistance, as well as their cognitive benefits by decreasing neuroinflammation.

"Our findings suggest that intake of dietary flavonoids at midlife may be related to improved odds of overall health and wellbeing in aging," they wrote. "Because the avoidance of the spectrum of health conditions in aging may be of more importance to individuals than avoiding any single chronic disease, these findings could help the adherence to public health recommendations regarding diet quality."

Source: [American Journal of Clinical Nutrition](#)

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"Dietary flavonoid intake at midlife and healthy aging in women"

Authors: C. Samieri, Q. Sun, M.K. Townsend, E.B. Rimm, F. Grodstein

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