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Supplement focus

RESVERATROL

You can thank this antioxidant for making a glass of red wine healthy – but can it help you live longer?



What is it?

Resveratrol is an antioxidant compound produced by certain plants as a natural defence against disease and attack by bacteria, fungi and other organisms that cause disease. In humans, it is believed by some to activate genes that help to promote longevity.

How do I use it?

Resveratrol can be found in red grapes, red wine and red grape juice. The antioxidant is also present in the skins of peanuts (most raw peanuts are sold with their skins on), berries such as mulberries, blueberries and cranberries, and dark chocolate. Supplements are often made from Japanese knotweed, which is a particularly rich source and, if you can find it, the young stems can be eaten as a spring vegetable.

How much do I need?

The optimal intake of resveratrol is not yet known, but 25–50mg a day is thought to be a good start. You are unlikely to get this amount from food alone, so supplementing can help.

HOW CAN IT HELP ME?

Increase life span – lab studies have shown that resveratrol doubles the lifespan of yeast and also increases longevity in worms and fruit flies. A 2006 study in the journal *Current Biology* found that it extended the lifespan of fish by 56 per cent.

Guard against heart disease – resveratrol has been found to prevent changes in LDL cholesterol, which leads to hardening of the arteries and coronary heart disease. It has also been shown to reduce platelet clumping, so thinning the blood, which helps protect against heart disease.

Inhibit cancer – resveratrol has been shown in studies to diminish cancer development via anti-inflammatory and antioxidant action, and by regulating normal cell growth. In one 2000 study in *Cancer Letters*, the treatment of human colon cancer cells with resveratrol caused a 70 per cent inhibition in growth. Other research found it to be effective in reducing growth of breast cancer cells.

Possible weight-loss aid – a 2006 study in *Current Medicinal Chemistry* found resveratrol inhibits the action of an enzyme needed to convert sugars into fat, and reduces insulin levels, so reducing hunger and blood sugar imbalances.



IS THIS THE SECRET OF FRENCH LONGEVITY?

Scientists have long been trying to understand why the French live longer and have a lower risk of heart disease compared to other Europeans, despite the fact they eat plenty of rich and fatty foods. However, they believe they may have hit on at least part of the reason in the red wine that many French people habitually drink with their lunch and dinner. The skin and seeds of the red grapes used in the wine-making process contain resveratrol, which appears to have a beneficial effect on both cardiovascular health and, possibly, lifespan. The better-quality reds contain more resveratrol. Researchers have also found, for example, that a good bottle of merlot or pinot noir can provide around 20mg of resveratrol, while cheap wines may only contain as little as 2mg. So if you do enjoy a glass of red it may be worth splashing out. **II**