

What are Phytonutrients

Active compounds in plant foods that promote health and help prevent disease



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Plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, wine, tea, and chocolate contain over 25,000 natural nutrients and active compounds called phytonutrients or phytochemicals. Plants produce these chemicals as an adaptive response to maintain an evolutionary advantage in reaction to their environments. They protect plants from germs, fungi, bugs, and other threats. These same protective benefits translate into human health when we consume diets rich in colourful plant foods. Phytonutrients can help reduce inflammation, protect against cellular damage, support detoxification processes, and generally help prevent disease and promote healthy aging and wellbeing.

Six phytonutrients groups of particular importance:

Flavonoids

help regulate cellular activity, fight free radicals & oxidative stress

Found in tea, wine, leafy vegetables onions, apples, berries, cherries, soybeans, and citrus fruits.

Carotenoids

help tackle harmful free radicals that damage tissues in your body.

Found in orange & yellow foods such carrots, melon, squash, pumpkin, sweet potato, apricots, bell peppers, papaya & mango

Ellagic Acid

an antioxidant that helps decrease levels of inflammation

Found in the berries (strawberries, raspberries, blackberries), pomegranates, grapes, and walnuts

Resveratrol

a polyphenol compound that acts as an antioxidant & anti-inflammatory

Found in the skin of dark red & purple foods such as grapes, blueberries, raspberries, and also peanuts.

Glucosinolates

have been shown to kill cancer cells and slow tumor growth

Found in cruciferous / Brassica plants such as cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli and kohlrabi

Phytoestrogens

mimic oestrogen and exert preventative oestrogen-like effects

Found in legumes, nuts and dried fruits such as soya, beans, lentils, cashews, almonds, peanuts, pistachios and apricots.

How many phytonutrients do we need in the diet?

There are no dietary reference values (DRVs) or upper limits for phytonutrients.

The amount may vary based on individual health status. See the [BANT Eat a Rainbow](#) infographic for foods.

