

Excerpt from feature article from the **Health Sciences Institute**

Nature's Perfect Food - Discover the amazing health benefits of the fruit from the Amazon's "tree of life" By Judy Douglas

If you get your health guidance from the mainstream media, you'd think the healthiest way to live is to guzzle red wine and drown everything in olive oil.

That's basically what they've told us in recent years. First, it was the "French paradox"--the fact that the French, who generally eat lots of cheese, cream, and butter; drink lots of wine; and smoke like chimneys, are healthier than Americans. Scientists told us it was all in the wine—specifically, in the anthocyanins—the antioxidant flavonoid that gives red grapes their deep color.

Then it was the "Mediterranean diet," the traditional way of eating in the regions of Italy and Spain, where olive oil is a staple. We learned that olive oil is a good source of essential fatty acids that are processed right out of many Americanized foods.

I'm not discounting the benefits of either of these phytochemicals. In fact, in a minute I'll explain exactly why both are so important to good health. I just question the sources recommended in the headlines. There's got to be a better way to get these valuable nutrients than guzzling wine and drowning in oil.

As it turns out, there is. I learned about it from HSI panelist Jon Barron. He told me about a single superfood from the Amazon that, fresh from the tree, can provide over 30 times the amount of anthocyanins as red wine and all the beneficial fatty acids of olive oil in one delicious, all-natural package. And this is just the beginning of this food's health benefits. It's virtually impossible to over-do this food—which is certainly not the case with red wine or olive oil.

Get the healing power of many phytonutrients in one delicious package. There's no disputing the health benefits of anthocyanins and essential fatty acids. Both have proven to be powerful nutritional tools in the quest for good health.

Research has shown that plant pigments like anthocyanins are potent antioxidants. The cardiovascular benefits are the most well known; studies show that anthocyanins can help prevent blood clots, improve blood circulation, relax blood vessels, and prevent atherosclerosis. But scientists have also uncovered a whole host of other powerful effects from anthocyanins, including antiviral and antiallergenic properties. Some research even suggests that anthocyanins can prevent cancer, by blocking carcinogenesis on a molecular level and encouraging tumor cell death.

Essential fatty acids have proven just as powerful. Oleic acid, a monounsaturated omega-9 acid, and linoleic acid, a polyunsaturated omega-6 acid, help lower LDL, and maintain healthy HDL levels. They also increase the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins like

vitamins A, E, D, and K, which are essential to good health. Research has even suggested that oleic acid may prevent against cancer and hypertension.

Olive oil may be the best known sources of these nutrients, but it is certainly not the only one. It's the pigment in red grapes that gives wine its anthocyanins—and that same pigment can also be found in other red and purple fruits and vegetables, such as blueberries, red cabbage, and purple sweet potatoes. Oleic acid is also present in pecans and seed oils, and linoleic acid is found in peanuts.

But there is one food that delivers it all—plus other healthy nutrients like fiber, phytosterols, and vitamins C and E. For centuries, it's been a staple for people in Brazil, yet virtually unknown to anyone outside the region—until now.

Discover the health secret of generations of Amazonian Indians.

It's called açai (pronounced ah-sigh-ee), and it's the fruit of a palm tree that grows in the rainforests of the Amazon—a tree Brazilians call "The Tree of Life." About 90 percent of the small, round fruit is its hard, inedible pit—but that's OK, because it's the outside skin that holds the treasure. That dark purple skin is what contains the anthocyanins.

The natives puree the skins, creating a treat that can be served warm as a sauce over fruit or grains or frozen like a sorbet. They've been eating it for centuries, passing down recipes from generation to generation. (The native people have also passed down the story of how açai was discovered.) Because fruit itself is perishable, its popularity never spread beyond the region.

Then, a few years ago, two friends from California went to Brazil on a surfing expedition and tasted açai for the first time. Before they even knew the health benefits, they were hooked on the taste. But once they learned that the tasty treat was also a nutritional powerhouse, they knew they had to find a way to bring açai to the rest of the world.

Superfood fights heart disease, cancer, prostate enlargement, and more.

Since then, the news about açai has been steadily spreading—and the evidence of nutritional and health benefits just keep piling up. Consider this: a 100-gram serving of açai contains only 90 calories, just two grams of fat and no cholesterol. Plus, it delivers 3.5 grams of dietary fiber, something we could all use more of in our diets. Improved processing of the fresh fruit is making it possible to preserve more of the fruit's healthful attributes. Currently, the puree provides more anthocyanins than red wine and has antioxidant concentrations that well outweigh blueberries.

Subsequent research has shown that in addition to the anthocyanins and essential fatty acids, açai also contains a healthy dose of plant sterols, another class of phytochemicals that have been shown to reduce cholesterol, protect the immune system, and relieve prostate enlargement. In fact, it turns out açai is in the same family as saw palmetto, a common herbal treatment for prostate enlargement. And researchers at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro have discovered that açai extract can be used to fight infection, like the parasitic infection schistosomiasis which affects 10 million Brazilians

each year and the common bacterial infection staphylococcus aureus. It seems there's no end to this miracle fruit's health benefits.

So instead of trying to emulate the French or the folks in the Mediterranean region, consider taking a cue from the native people of the Amazon.

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