

# Açaí palm

## Euterpe oleracea



*Acai (ah-sigh-EE) berries are a grape-like fruit native to the rainforests of South America. They are harvested from acai palm trees.*

*The fruits are about 1 to 2 centimeters (cm) in diameter and a deep purple color. The seed constitutes about 80 percent of the fruit. The taste of acai berries has been described as a blend of chocolate and berries, with a slight metallic aftertaste.*

*Acai berries have been called a superfood, with benefits ranging from improved skin appearance to weight loss, but not all of these claims are supported by evidence.*

*This feature is part of a collection of articles on the health benefits of some popular foods. It looks at the nutritional breakdown of acai berries, its possible health benefits, how to get more acai berries into your diet, and the possible health risks of consuming acai berries.*

## Health benefits

*Many fruit and vegetables offer a range of health benefits, and acai berries are no exception.*

### *Cognitive function*

Age-related brain diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease have no cure, but research suggests that diets rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory polyphenolic compounds may lower the risk of these diseases.

Specifically, the antioxidant anthocyanin, which is abundant in acai berries, may lower oxidative stress and inflammation, promoting brain health.

Anthocyanins also have been shown to enhance and improve memory. They are thought to work by inhibiting neuroinflammation, activating synaptic signaling, and improving blood flow to the brain.



## *Heart health*

Anthocyanin consumption has been strongly linked to oxidative stress protection. One study has found that regular consumption of anthocyanins can reduce the risk of heart attack by 32 percent in young and middle-aged women. The fiber and heart-healthy fats in acai also support heart health. Heart-healthy fats increase HDL cholesterol and decrease LDL cholesterol. Several longitudinal studies have reported a significantly lower cardiovascular disease risk <sup>Trusted Source</sup> and all-cause mortality with high consumption of fiber. Fiber intake also reduces LDL cholesterol.

Fiber intake is not only associated with a lower incidence of cardiovascular disease, but also a slower progression of the disease in high-risk individuals. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative and Health (NCCIH) note that consuming acai berries may help reduce <sup>Trusted Source</sup> cholesterol and blood sugar levels in people with excess weight.

## *Anticancerous properties*

*Anthocyanins have been observed to engage in anticarcinogenic activities, although the exact mechanisms*

are unknown. Laboratory studies using a variety of cancer cells have indicated that anthocyanins:

- act as antioxidants
- activate detoxifying enzymes
- prevent cancer cell proliferation
- induce cancer cell death
- have anti-inflammatory effects
- inhibit some of the beginning of the formation of tumors
- prevent cancer cell invasion

These functions have been observed in multiple animal and culture studies.

A small study of 25 patients with colorectal cancer found that a 7-day intake of 0.5-2.0 grams (g) of anthocyanins resulted in improvements similar to other therapies.



## *Performance in athletes*

*Results of a study published in 2015 suggest that consuming acai berry juice for 6 weeks did not improve Trusted Source the sprint performance of seven athletes.*

*However, it was linked to an increase in plasma antioxidant activity, serum lipid profiles improved, and it appeared to help with exercise-induced muscle injury.*

## *Nutrition*



*Acai berries are rich in fatty acids and contain more antioxidants than other popular berries.*

*According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), one 3-gram teaspoon of acai berry powder contains Trusted Source:*

- 20 calories
- 0 g protein
- 1.5 g total fat
- 1 g carbohydrate
- 1 g fiber
- 6 milligrams (mg) calcium

*Acai berries are rich in fatty acids, especially oleic, palmitic, and linoleic acids.*

*Although acai berries contain very little total protein, they do contain 19 amino acids, as well as several sterols, including campesterol, stigmasterol, and beta-sitosterol. The phytochemicals in acai berries include mainly anthocyanins and proanthocyanidins.*

*Acai berries contain more antioxidants than other commonly eaten berries. They also are high in fiber and heart-healthy fats. The antioxidant effects of acai berries have largely been attributed to phenolic compounds.*

*Antioxidants in the body are believed to help protect against various diseases as they can neutralize oxidative damage caused by environmental stressors, such as pollution.*



## Risks

*It is the total diet or overall eating pattern that is most important in disease prevention and achieving good health. It is better to eat a diet with variety than to concentrate on individual foods as the key to good health. Experiments have been done using acai pulp as an oral contrast for gastrointestinal MRIs. Very large doses of acai might affect the results of MRI scans. If you are going to have an MRI test, it is important to let the doctor know if you have been eating acai berries.*

*Some supplement companies have made claims that acai berry supplements will help with weight loss.*