The primary actions of bilberry can be attributed to the presence of two main constituents: very powerful antioxidants known as anthocyanidins, and membrane-tightening compounds called tannins.

TUMMY TAMER
The dried ripe bilberry fruit is used routinely in treating diarrhea in both adults and children. To prove its efficacy, lab animals were given large doses of a bilberry extract for 10 days, following which scientists at the University of Copenhagen observed a significant increase in the release of anti-inflammatory prostaglandins directly into the digestive tract. In addition, bilberry juice has demonstrated excellent results in the treatment of stomach ulcers, especially when bacterial invasion of *H. pylori* is suspected. Further anti-ulcer activity was observed when bilberry was used in studies involving animals that had acute and chronic ulcers.

SEEING MAY BE BELIEVING
Bilberry has long been credited for an ability to improve and protect vision. Scientists have proposed that because bilberry improves overall oxygenation of tissues, it can lessen free-radical damage to the eyes. These effects may be helpful for diabetics who suffer from vision problems related to the disease, as well as patients with eye weakness, cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, myopia, and night blindness. The berries are especially helpful for those who rely on their vision for work, including those of us who work at a computer screen, as well as professional drivers, pilots, sports professionals, and air traffic controllers.

CANCER CLAIMS
Bilberry has also been proven to decrease mutations in cells, which may decrease risk of cancer. A University of Maryland study published in *Nutrition and Cancer* in 2006 supports bilberry's use in cancer prevention by indicating that bilberry
HOLISTIC HEALING

extract can inhibit multiple biomarkers of colon cancer in rats.

HEALTHY HEART

Bilberry extract has been shown to protect and improve the integrity of capillary walls. The berries contain pectin, which helps to prevent the buildup of plaque in the blood and binds with cholesterol, lowering its levels. Bilberry extract has also been used to treat atherosclerosis and lower triglycerides as well as low-density lipoprotein, or LDL, the “bad” cholesterol.

SWEET SURRENDER

Traditionally, bilberry has been used to lower blood sugar levels, making it useful in the treatment of non-insulin dependent diabetes. However, it has also been effective for increasing insulin that has been suppressed due to chronic stress. A study reported in the journal Metabolism in 2000 with bilberry extract and diabetic rats showed a decrease in the progressive side effects of diabetes.

NURTURING THE NOGGIN

Another recent study revealed that anthocyanin-rich preparations of bilberry (50 percent inhibition) were the most potent inhibitor of oxidation to brain tissues when compared to other berry preparations (Vaccinium spp.). Oxidative stress on brain tissues has been implicated in their degeneration, leading to conditions such as Parkinson’s disease.

The next time you are preparing a healthy dessert or fruit shake, remember to include bilberries. They are good for your eyesight, your heart, your head, and your longevity!

Cautionary notes

Due to bilberry’s effect on platelet aggregation, it is best to seek the advice of a natural medicine professional if you are taking NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories such as Aspirin) or anticoagulants (warfarin or heparin). Please note that self-administration of bilberry and its extracts is in no way a suitable substitute for insulin or insulin-balancing medications.

Bilberries

Bev Maya, MH, is a medical herbalist trained at the College of Phytotherapy in England. She practises at Maya Natural Health in North Vancouver, BC. mayanaturalhealth.com

Prairie Naturals helps Canadians live the healthy life by providing premium quality natural health products and safe natural hair & skin care products. Visit a participating Natural Health Product Retailer to learn more about the Live the Healthy Life 8 Week Program and be on your way to a happier, healthier you!