Making zinc easy to swallow

Maintain adequate daily levels of zinc to protect yourself from esophageal cancer. Chinese researchers reporting their findings in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* (February 2005) discovered that higher levels of zinc in people’s tissues corresponded with a lower risk of esophageal cancer. Risk factors for esophageal cancer include excess alcohol consumption, smoking, injury or scarring of the esophagus, and long-term acid reflux. The study’s authors recommend eating zinc-rich foods such as meats, nuts, oysters, legumes, sesame tahini, nutritional yeast, whole grains, and fortified cereals, or taking a daily zinc supplement (approximately 15 mg) to obtain the many benefits of zinc. In addition to protecting the esophagus, zinc also speeds wound healing and boosts immune-system function.

Welcome news for choco-philes

Chocolate fanciers are celebrating—but only if they are dark chocolate lovers. Another study on chocolate, this time from University of L’Aquila, Italy, concludes what we have all prayed for: dark chocolate truly is the latest health food! The study, published in the March 2005 issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* reports that “dark (not white) chocolate decreases blood pressure and improves insulin sensitivity in healthy persons.”

Flavonols, a family of naturally occurring polyphenolic compounds with antioxidant properties, are considered the source of these therapeutic properties. Also found in green and black teas, Red Delicious apples with the peels, and apricots, flavonols relax blood vessels and stimulate glucose absorption.

Unfortunately, the recommended “dosage” is small. Researchers say no more than 100 grams is required to get the beneficial effects.

Avocados contain heart-healthy, unsaturated fat that enhances the benefits of a wide range of mixed carotenoids from foods. Lycopene from tomatoes, lutein, zeaxanthin, and alpha- and beta-carotene from spinach, lettuce, and carrots are all better absorbed and distributed when eaten in combination with avocados.

Mixed carotenoids from food contain a wide range of antioxidant pigments that decrease the risk of many degenerative diseases including cancer, heart disease, and age-related macular degeneration.

A side dish of avocado may be the perfect prescription.

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