



JULIE'S HEALTH CLUB

Where alternative and mainstream health meet

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The color code diet

There is a color code to food, meaning that if you pick the right color, there can be a nutritional payoff. Other times, it makes absolutely no difference.

Blue tortillas, for example, are known to be softer and sweeter than white or yellow corn tortillas. But the darker color also may indicate that they are a healthier choice, according to Mexican scientists.

New research shows that the pigmented maize can be better for dieters and diabetics than their white counterparts because they have less starch, a lower glycemic index and 20 percent more protein, said according to a study in the *Journal of the Science of Food and Agriculture*.

The glycemic index measures how quickly certain foods release carbohydrates into the body, which then raises the blood glucose levels. If a food is digested and absorbed quickly, it has a high GI value. High GI foods cause blood-sugar levels to rise more rapidly.

But the real secret may be that blue-corn tortillas get their hue from anthocyanins, which are also called flavonoids and are found in blackberries, blueberries, cherries, cranberries, strawberries, kiwi, plums, red grapes, red cabbage and the skin of an eggplant.

As an antioxidant, anthocyanins may neutralize free radicals that damage cells and cells, and might help improve memory and urinary-tract health and reduce cancer risk, according to the "American Dietetic Association's Complete Food and Nutrition Guide" (Wiley, \$24.95).

And it's likely that consumers will be seeing more of them from the nutraceutical or functional nutrition viewpoint, according to the researchers, who recommend blue tortillas for those with particular nutritional or metabolic requirements.

"They are considered natural antioxidants in view of their ability to trap free radicals, which produce molecular and cell damage," they wrote.

But blue tortillas are just one example of the color code. Here are other parts of the puzzle about how to make healthy food choices based on color:

Red or purple grapes versus green grapes: Choose red or purple.

The darker skin contains resveratrol, a phytochemical that prevents blood clotting, according to registered dietitian Marjorie Livingston, an assistant professor at the Culinary Institute of America. Also consider buying organic. The grape's thin skin doesn't offer much protection from the 35 pesticides used by conventional vineyards, wrote Renée Loux in "The Balanced Plate" (Rodale, \$22.95).

Brown rice versus white rice: Choose brown.

"White rice has been processed and stripped of its natural vitamins and fiber," said Dr. Keith Block, co-founder and medical director of the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Treatment in Evanston. "Additionally, diets containing whole grains, including brown rice, may help to lower the risk of gastrointestinal cancers and hormone-dependent cancers [breast, ovarian, prostate, etc.]." The one exception might be white basmati rice, said Bonnie Minsky of Nutritional Concepts. "For those with digestive conditions, basmati is much easier on the gastrointestinal tract," she said.

Brown eggs versus white or blue-green eggs: Choose any color.

Shell color depends on the specific breed of hen and has nothing to do with nutrition. (White feathers means a hen's eggs will have a white shell.) The key is what the hen has been eating. "When hens are fed feed that contains flax, it increases the omega-3 content of the yolk," Block said. "It has been shown that omega-3-fortified eggs contain 20 percent less cholesterol. In addition, omega-3 fatty acids help reduce inflammation." There's one exception. The bluish-green eggs, which come from the South American Araucana chicken, are not much different from traditional white and brown eggs but have a higher cholesterol content, according to the Egg Nutrition Center.

Brown bread versus white bread: Choose brown, if you must, but don't assume it's more nutritious.

Brown could just have carmel coloring. "I'm not a big fan of either," Minsky said. "However, brown has slightly more nutritive value." If you're choosing between whole-grain brown bread and white bread, whole grain wins by a landslide. "White bread is basically empty calories, even when it is enriched," Minsky said.

Red bell peppers versus green, yellow or orange: Choose red.

A red bell pepper is a green bell pepper that has matured. (If the pepper turns orange or yellow it is has been hybridized for those colors, Livingston said.) Though some say there is no nutritional difference, others believe riper peppers have better flavor and more nutrition.

"Red bell peppers have the advantage of containing lycopene, which is a powerful antioxidant best known for maintaining prostate health," Block said.