

Berry Mysterious

Berries have special powers even scientists haven't fully figured out

YOU MAY HAVE HEARD that berries have seemingly magical powers, fighting everything from aging to bacterial infections to cancer. But even as study after study links berry consumption to such potential health benefits, researchers can't definitively explain exactly how such fruits work their magic.

It might have something to do with antioxidants. Berries and berry-like fruits, such as pomegranates, are high in these nutrients, which could prevent free radical damage. Environmental exposure, and even the natural process of breaking down certain foods, can produce free radicals, which can degrade bodily cells through oxidization (just as exposure to air can cause metal to oxidize or rust).

But it's possible that antioxidants work in tandem with other phytochemicals and compounds in berries. That's why researchers and nutritionists often say that eating foods rich in antioxidants, not the antioxidants all by themselves, is possibly what produces berries' magical powers. Here's a look at what they can do.

PROTECT YOUR MIND

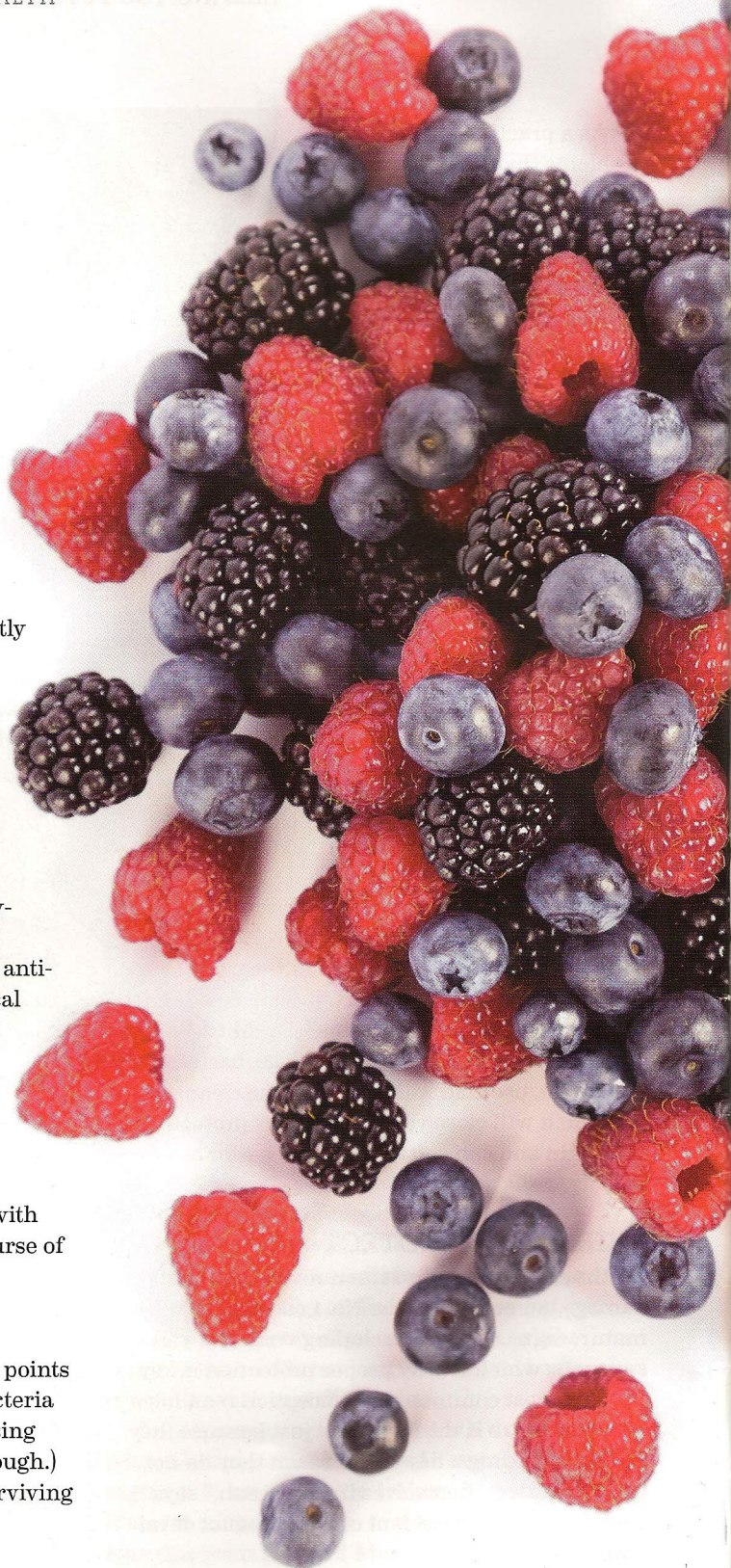
A U.S. Department of Agriculture study, in partnership with the Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University, showed that antioxidants could reduce or even reverse age-related neural decline. Over eight months, rats that were fed supplements with strawberry, blueberry and spinach extracts reversed the normal course of age-related deficits in behavioral, cognitive and motor skills.

PREVENT INFECTIONS

The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine points to evidence that some components of cranberries could prevent bacteria like *E. coli* from attaching to the walls of the urinary tract and causing infections. (It has not been proven to treat an existing infection, though.) It also could reduce the chances of other, ulcer-causing bacteria surviving in the stomach.

SLOW CANCER GROWTH

A December 2012 study at the University of California, Riverside found that three components of pomegranate juice, which have already been shown to inhibit the spread of prostate cancer cells, also have a similar effect on breast cancer cells. Other lab tests have found anticancer properties in açai berries, but research is still ongoing. — *By Sam Mittelsteadt*



Another Way to Get Your Antioxidants

Give your skin a healthy dose of these free-radical-fighting saviors with a facial. Go to MassageEnvy.com to find a location near you.