

Why All Apples Are Not Created Equal

BY MERRITT WATTSFOOD / October 31st, 2013



It may be candy day but it's also apple season. Learn how know to optimize your doc-endorsed fruit habit.

An apple a day, as the saying goes, has long been known as the cure for what ails us. But since when has eating well been quite that simple? Author Jo Robinson spent the last ten years combing through over 6,000 studies about phytonutrients in fruits and vegetables for her bestselling book *Eating on the Wild Side* and discovered that the way our apples have been bred, grown, and stored has a measurable impact on the health benefits they can deliver.

One study that caught Robinson's eye was research done on a group of overweight men in which half took the "apple a day" adage literally, adding a Golden Delicious apple to their daily diet to see if it would improve their health. The results were shocking: The apple-eaters had higher levels of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides at the end of the study, making them more at risk for heart disease than they had been at the start. The explanation was the kind of apple they used: The Golden Delicious variety has such high sugar content and is so low in phytonutrients, that eating one daily may have been detrimental to the health of the study participants.

The bad news is that some apples are less healthy than others. Golden Delicious, Pink Lady, Elf Star, Empire and Ginger Gold apples are all varieties that have high levels of sugar and few antioxidants, according to Robinson. Yes, they're still better than a candy bar – but not by much.

Now for the good news: Some of the healthiest apples available are right under your own nose (we'll get to that in a minute), and there are standard guidelines for choosing wisely. Shopping at a farmer's market will widen your options when it comes to varieties, but it will also guarantee you a recently-harvested apple. "All apples store well – commercial growers especially know how to keep them crisp," says Robinson, "but the ones that are fresh-picked will always have more antioxidants than ones that have been stored." Another tip; go organic all the way. "The skin of an apple has 90% of the pesticides, but 50% of the nutrients," says Robinson, which is why apples are the one fruit you should always buy organic and never bother to peel.

Looking for the best of the bunch? Choose from our list of apple all-stars.

GRANNY SMITH

One of the most nutritious common apples, a Granny Smith apple has 13 times more phytonutrients than a Ginger Gold, according to Robinson.

LIBERTY

This up-and-coming apple variety is only 25 years old, but it has twice the antioxidant value of Golden Delicious apples.

RED DELICIOUS

Yep, this sweet supermarket staple is relatively high in phytonutrients, provided you eat the dark red skin that's rich in anthocyanins.

HONEYCRISP

We're in luck – the sweet-tart apple that everyone loves is one of the most phytonutrient-rich varieties in the grocery store.

BRAEBURN

This bi-colored apple has a reddish-green skin, but look for one with the reddest skin, which means it was exposed to the sun and developed an extra supply of phytonutrients.