

Added Beauty From Blueberries

Blueberries, already known to help fight cancer and diabetes, may guard against heart disease as well, a new study suggests. The juicy little berries contain a compound called pterostilbene (pronounced ter-a-STILL-bean), which may have the potential to lower cholesterol as effectively as commercial drugs do.

Dr. Agnes M. Rimando, a research chemist for the federal Department of Agriculture in Oxford, Miss., who made the discovery,

said she had suspected that the antioxidants in blueberries might help lower cholesterol. So she exposed chemicals found in blueberries to liver cells taken from rats. She found that pterostilbene activates a cell receptor that plays a role in lowering cholesterol and other blood fats.

The chemical's action is similar to that of ciprofibrate, a drug that lowers L.D.L. cholesterol and triglycerides, which promote the development of plaques in the arteries, Dr. Rimando said. If pterostilbene could be concentrated into pill form, it might be able to lower cholesterol as well as the drug but without the side effects of muscle pain and nausea that ciprofibrate causes in some people, she said.

Because the compound appears to be effective even in low concentrations, people might be able to get the cholesterol-lowering benefit simply by eating blueberries. But it is not yet known how many one would need to eat.

