

After the Blueberries

Summer is gone and so are the healthy fruits and veggies of the season. What do we eat now? **By Sanjay Gupta, M.D.**

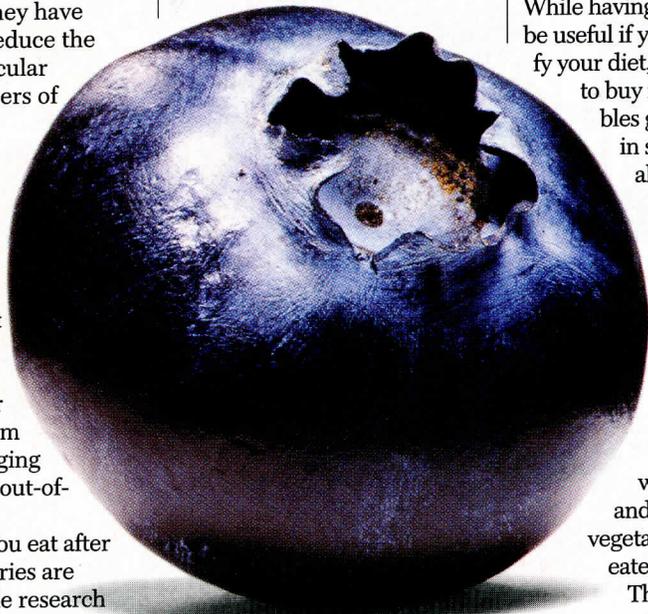
IF THERE IS ONE FOOD I would recommend that my patients eat every day, it is blueberries. Not only do blueberries taste great, but they have well-documented antioxidant powers, which is probably why they seem to help ward off Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. I also encourage people to eat vine-ripened tomatoes and citrus fruits, because they have been shown to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and cancers of the prostate and colon.

The only problem with these health-promoting summer fruits and vegetables is that when summer is over, many grocery stores either stop carrying them or start overcharging for substandard, out-of-season fare.

So what do you eat after the local blueberries are gone? I did a little research last week, when autumn officially began, and found that filling the summer-blueberry void is easier than I expected. Fall, after all, is a season of vibrant colors, and that turns out to be just what you want in a fruit or vegetable. As a rule of thumb, says Althea Zanecosky, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, the more colorful the produce the better it is for you. "A fruit or vegetable with a lot of pigment is actually very rich in antioxidants," says Zanecosky, pointing to the

deep greens, dark yellows and vibrant oranges that fill the fruit and vegetable section of supermarkets each autumn.

Apples, cranberries, pumpkins and squashes are some of the season's most powerful foods. Apples contain flavanoids, some of the most potent antioxidants known. Several studies have shown that people who eat a diet rich in flavanoids



have a lower risk of heart disease and heart attacks as well as several types of cancer. Pumpkins, those quintessential autumn vegetables, are much more than Halloween decorations. Pumpkins and other orange-colored fruits and vegetables are rich in vitamin C, vitamin A, folate and carotenoids. Carotenoids, such as beta-carotene, are excellent cancer-prevention compounds. Yellow and orange squashes are rich in vitamins A and C, potassium and fiber. Squashes, like

pumpkins, are good sources of carotenoids. And if you are looking for berries that ripen in the fall, cranberries contain the same heart-healthy condensed tannins found in tea and red wine.

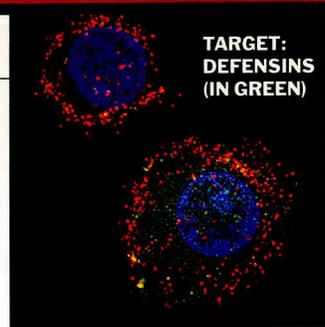
Of course, it's possible to get off-season fruits in many supermarkets these days, if you are willing to pay for imported, frozen or canned varieties.

While having these options can be useful if you need to diversify your diet, it's generally best to buy fruit and vegetables grown locally and in season. "There is always going to be a benefit to something seasonal," says registered dietician Julie Walsh of the American Dietetic Association. The nutrients in plants actually change with the seasons, and many fruits and vegetables lose potency if eaten past their prime.

The body uses the same nutrients all year round, but it has special needs in autumn. The shorter days and colder weather make people less active, which is why it's all the more important to eat a healthy and balanced diet. The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends five or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day—even if they have to be pumpkins instead of blueberries.

—Reported by **A. Chris Gajilan/New York**

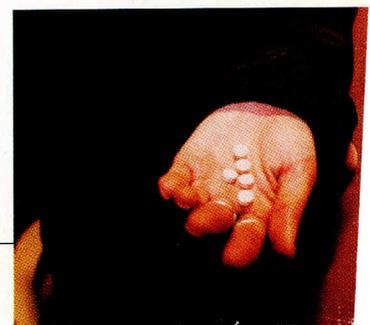
Dr. Gupta is a neurosurgeon and CNN medical correspondent



AIDS MYSTERY One of the great mysteries about AIDS is why some people (about 1% or 2%) who get infected with the virus never develop the disease. For more than 15 years, scientists have searched for the chemical factors that protect these so-called long-term nonprogressors, and now a team of researchers including Dr. David Ho, director of the Aaron Diamond AIDS Research Center, think they have found them. Using new protein-chip technology, they have identified three proteins—alpha-defensins 1, 2 and 3—that are present in nonprogressors but not in AIDS patients. The defensins, which are well known as natural bacteria fighters, could offer scientists a promising new focus for drug design. "This is not going to be the ultimate solution," says Ho, "but it's another weapon we can use in our arsenal against HIV."

ECSTASY SHAKES Experimenting with ecstasy may not be as risk-free as some users believe. A new study says popping two or three pills in one night can cause enough damage to dopamine neurons in the brain to lead to parkinsonism—a condition similar to Parkinson's disease that is characterized by tremors, sluggishness and balance problems. Scientists at Johns Hopkins arrived at this conclusion by studying the effects of high doses of ecstasy on squirrel monkeys and baboons, but believe the results may apply to humans as well. —By **Sora Song**

Sources: Science (2)



BRIAN HAGIWARA—GETTY IMAGES

JACLYN HO—AARON DIAMOND AIDS RESEARCH CENTER

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