Purple pigments and obesity

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Here's to purple power: Colorful pigments found in the skin of blueberries, strawberries and other fruits and vegetables may help prevent obesity, according to recent animal studies.Courtesy of USDA Agricultural Research Service

Scientists in Arkansas are reporting new evidence that natural pigments responsible for the beautiful blue/purple/reddish color of certain fruits and vegetables may help prevent obesity. Their animal study, scheduled for the Feb. 13 issue of ACS' *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*, however, reports that eating the whole fruit containing these pigments seems to be less effective than eating an extract of the berry.

Ronald L. Prior and colleagues, who did the new study, note that past research has shown that the pigments — called anthocyanins — prevent obesity in laboratory mice fed a high-fat diet. Anthocyanins are found in grape skins, blueberries, blackberries, purple corn, and other foods. The mice also had other healthful changes in disease-related substances found in the blood.

In the new study, researchers found that mice fed a high-fat diet for 8 weeks plus drinking water with purified anthocyanins from blueberries and strawberries gained less weight and had lower body fat levels than a control group. “Anthocyanins fed as the whole blueberry did not prevent and may have actually increased obesity,” the study reported. “However, feeding purified anthocyanins from blueberries or strawberries reduced obesity.”

Source: ACS