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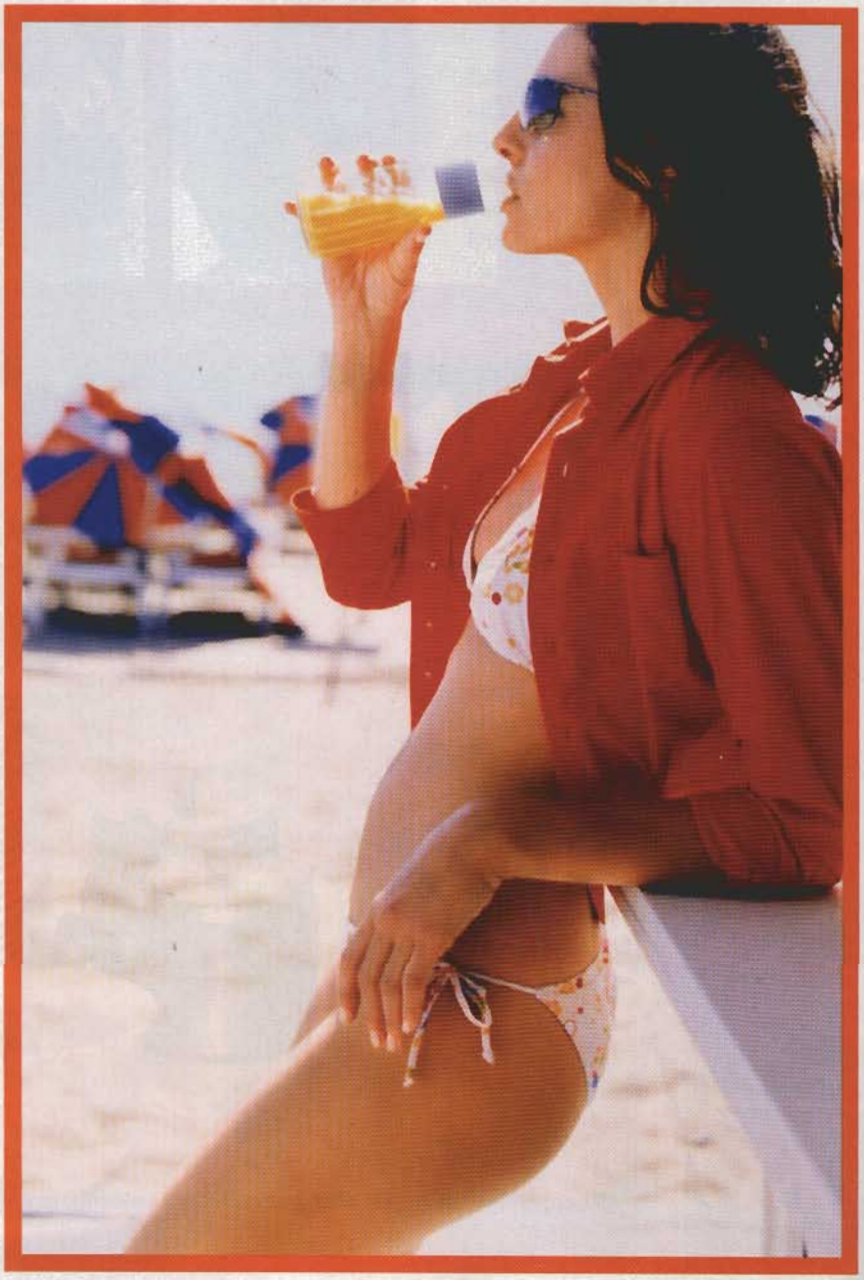
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Foodwise

The big squeeze



Fruit juices have been slammed for being high in carbs and low in fiber. But do they have any redeeming qualities? Get ready for a surprise.

By Stacey Colino

Fruit juice has become the Britney Spears of the grocery store, typically scoffed at by those old enough to remember a time before ultra-low-rise jeans. Between being called liquid sugar by the anti-carb crowd and being blamed for the rising obesity rate among kids, it would seem that juices are simply not worth swallowing. (In fact, their sales dropped 1.4 percent between 2002 and 2003, the first decline in more than 6 years, according to a recent report by www.marketresearch.com.) And mainstream nutritionists promote the whole fruit over juice for its fiber and pulp. But the truth is, some fruit juices do deserve a place at your table because of their nutrients and powerful disease-fighting properties.

"Juice is at times unduly maligned," says David Katz, MD, MPH, director of the Yale Prevention Research Center in New Haven, Connecticut, a *Health* Editorial Advisory Board

member and author of *The Way to Eat*. "There are many benefits to drinking juice in moderation." There are times, Katz says, when juice is uniquely beneficial. After a workout, for example, it helps replace fluids and blood sugar and provides nutrients. Juice also comes in handy when eating is simply not convenient—when you're driving, say, or traveling, but still want something with nutritional value.

In fact, in the beverage hierarchy, real fruit juice trumps soda (both the regular and diet varieties) and fruit-flavored drinks on the nutrition front. And "if it's 100 percent juice, it counts as a serving of fruit," notes Nancy L. Cohen, PhD, RD, chair of the Department of Nutrition at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. But not all juices are equally healthy. Apple juice, for example, may be one of the most popular juices on the planet, but it's a relative lightweight as far as nutrients go; a cup of the average brand offers 103 milligrams of vitamin C (thanks to added ascorbic acid) and 295 milligrams of potassium, but little else.

On the other hand, purple grape juice is fast emerging as a health-protective powerhouse, mostly because it's rich in polyphenols, a class of antioxidants that protects against certain forms of cancer and heart disease. In fact, a small study from Korea (partially funded by Welch Foods Inc.) found that drinking Concord grape juice daily for 8 weeks slightly reduced blood pressure in men with hypertension. Meanwhile, tomato juice, a concentrated source of lycopene (an antioxidant linked with reduced risks of prostate, breast, colorectal, and lung cancers), may bolster the immune system, reduce bad cholesterol, and make blood platelets less sticky.

To increase juices' nutritional value—and, of course, their sales—some manufacturers are fortifying

Juicy facts

With fruit juices getting such a bad rap, manufacturers have been working overtime to create new varieties with added benefits. But are they any good? We try the newest contenders and tell you whether they're worth sipping.



Blueberry juice

Brands: R.W. Knudsen Just Blueberry ($6.99 for 32 ounces), Wyman's Wild Blueberry ($2.99–$3.69 for 46 ounces)
What we love: A potent source of antioxidants, including carotenoids and anthocyanins, blueberries may help suppress cancer growth, reduce heart disease risk, and boost memory.
Caveats: Just Blueberry is pure, tart blueberry juice—dilute it with sparkling water for a refreshing drink. The wild-blueberry juice includes grape and apple juices for flavor, which adds calories.



Antioxidant-packed juices

Brand: Tropicana Pure Premium Essentials Immunity Defense orange juice ($3.49 for 64 ounces), with vitamins C and E, and selenium
What we love: "There's good evidence that moderate doses of selenium and vitamin E can benefit immune function," Katz says. Plus, carotenoids found naturally in OJ may lower risk of cancer.
Caveats: If you drink the juice and take a multivitamin, "you can easily exceed the prudent amounts of these nutrients," Katz notes.



Vegetable-fruit blends

Brands: Vruit Berry Veggie Blend ($1.99 for 1 liter), Kagome Orange Carrot Blossom ($3.49–$3.95 for 30 ounces)
What we love: With a mixture of citrus, carrot, and other vegetable juices, the drink offers a wide array of phytochemicals, including carotenoids and flavonoids.
Caveats: It's a lot more palatable than straight carrot juice, but doesn't give you *all* the benefits of a serving of veggies (you get the nutrients, but not the fiber in whole vegetables).



Plant-sterol juices

Brand: Minute Maid Premium Heart Wise Orange Juice ($3.29 for 64 ounces)
What we love: Infused with plant sterols, which have been found to lower total and LDL cholesterol, "it offers a benefit to those who are reluctant to take medication to lower their cholesterol," Katz says.
Caveats: "If you don't have high cholesterol, plant sterols have no demonstrable benefit," Katz explains.

Photography by Gregor Halenda