

Dutch research: fruit and veggies may improve lung function

Eating lots of fruit and vegetables appears to improve lung function, according to results of a study at the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment in Bilthoven, the Netherlands.

The investigators found that eating whole-grain bread was also linked to better lung function. They suggest that antioxidants found in fruit, vegetables, and whole grains may account for the findings.

A team of researchers studied data from over 3,000 men, collected in Finland, Italy, and The Netherlands. The men, aged 40 to 59 at the start of the study, completed interviews with trained dietitians and nutritionists about their health and usual eating and drinking habits, and their lung function was assessed through spirometry testing.

As expected, smoking had a negative effect on lung function in men from all three countries. Other study results, however, varied from one country to another, especially after the researchers accounted for age, smoking, body mass index, and alcohol consumption.

In Finnish men, better lung function was associated with higher intake of vitamins C and E. In Italy, it was related to fruit intake as well as to those vitamins. And in The Netherlands, lung function was associated with intake of beta-carotene.

Vitamins C and E and beta-carotene are all antioxidants that are found in produce and that are believed to fight damage in the airways as well as in other parts of the body. In all three countries, lung function was better in men whose fruit and vegetable intake was above average, and worse in those whose intake was below average.

In their report, researchers note that relationships between individual foods or nutrients were not consistent across the three countries. They suggest that in addition to differences in national diet, it may be easier to evaluate consumption of general categories like “fruit and vegetables” than to assess intake of specific items such as vitamin C or beta-carotene.

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