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Acai berries top the charts for antioxidant potency, but commercial processing may destroy nutritional content

by Jessica Fraser

(NewsTarget) New research appearing in the Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry has found that although the Amazonian acai berry has the highest antioxidant content of any food, certain commercial processing methods may strip the fruit of much of its nutrition.

Two studies led by Alex Schauss from AIBMR Life Sciences -- along with colleagues from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the University of California and other institutions -- examined the antioxidant properties of OptiAcai-brand freeze-dried [acai](#) fruit pulp and skin powder, as measured by the powder's oxygen radical absorbance capacity (ORAC).

Schauss and his team found that the OptiAcai product had a 1026.9 ORAC score, compared to an ORAC score of 155 for other commercially available freeze-dried acai samples.

"What mystifies me is that the acai products we tested in the commercial marketplace had a fraction of the [antioxidant](#) activity reported in our paper for OptiAcai," Schauss said.

The OptiAcai product also demonstrated "extraordinarily high" peroxy scavenging activity -- the highest of any food researched so far -- as well as high superoxide scavenging activity. According to Schauss, the ability of acai [berries](#) to halt the formation of damaging free radicals could have profound implications for treatment of a wide range of diseases.

Schauss says that although the OptiAcai product was impressive in its antioxidant content, not all acai products available on the market are as effective.

"We believe there are many reasons for the lower ORAC values of various acais that have been on the market for some time," Schauss said. "First, freeze-drying is superior to spray drying or air drying in retaining phytochemicals and nutrients, but more expensive. We believe that other suppliers have not considered the issue of enzymatic degradation of the fruit."

Much of the acai shipped from Brazil to the United States or Europe is sent in large frozen blocks that fail to prevent nutritional degradation, Schauss said. For that reason, many commercially available acai products have low ORAC levels.

Consumer advocate Mike Adams, author of "[The Seven Laws of Nutrition](#)," said acai berries have a pleasant taste and provide high-density natural medicine to consumers.

"As with many of the smaller berries such as blueberries, sea buckthorn and goji berries, acai berries pack a potent nutritional punch in a tiny package," Adams said. "I recommend them to anyone interested in improving their health."

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