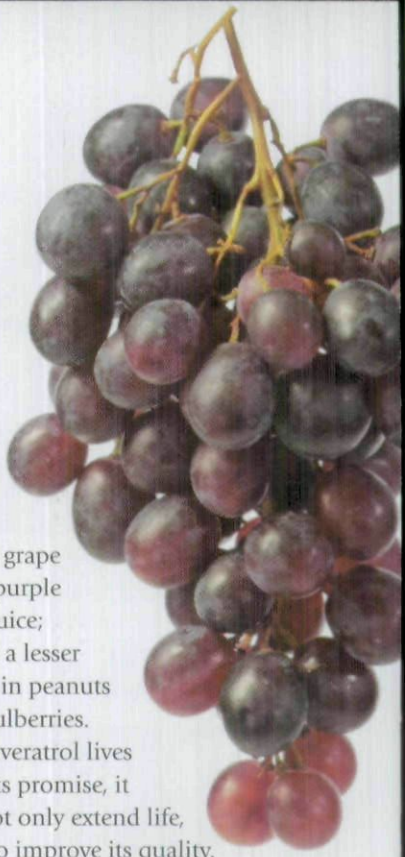
a toast to resveratrol

By Jonny Bowden, PhD, CNS

Why this magic compound may be the closest thing to an antiaging elixir



Want to live longer? Eat less.

Sorry. Don't kill the messenger. Calorie restriction is the only strategy that has been consistently shown to extend life in every species studied so far. Feed rats about one-third less than they normally eat, and faster than you can say "Methuselah," they live approximately 50 percent longer than their normal lifespan. It's worked in yeast, fruit flies, mice, the aforementioned rats, and—most recently—in rhesus monkeys.

And though the likelihood of a long-term human trial comparing "free-eating" and "calorie-restricted" subjects over a couple of decades is pretty remote, all indications are that reducing calories would extend life in our own species just as it does in every other one that's been studied. So that's simple enough, right? Just reduce your calories by about 33 percent, and you'll have a nice, long, healthy life. OK, class dismissed, lesson learned.

DID YOU KNOW? Recent research has shown that resveratrol may reduce insulin resistance, a key factor in metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes.

Yeah, right. As you can imagine, that particular strategy is not winning the popularity sweepstakes. Which is why there's been so much attention focused on a little plant chemical called resveratrol.

To understand exactly how resveratrol exerts its antiaging magic, we have to go back to those calorie-deprived rats. Apparently, caloric restriction turns on a set of genes known as the sirtuin genes, which are considered to be major influencers of how long we live. "The sirtuin genes are the holy grail of medicine and nutrition," says Mark Houston, MD. "These genes turn on or turn off different metabolic pathways that are designed to promote longevity and health."

Back in 2003, David Sinclair, MD, a researcher at Harvard Medical School, began investigating the sirtuin genes. To everyone's delight, Sinclair discovered that there was another way to turn on these genes. He and his associates published a now-famous paper reporting that plant compounds known as polyphenols could activate the human SIRT1 gene. And the polyphenol that seemed to do this best was resveratrol.

Resveratrol is found in red wine; the skin of young, unripe red grapes; grape seeds; purple grape juice; and, to a lesser extent, in peanuts and mulberries.

If resveratrol lives up to its promise, it may not only extend life, but also improve its quality. Resveratrol has been shown in studies to inhibit the growth of several cancer cell lines and tumors. It's a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory; it ramps up detoxification enzymes in the liver; protects the heart through several different mechanisms; and also protects brain cells.

So should you add resveratrol to your daily supplement regimen? I certainly think so, and I'm not alone. The total amount of resveratrol in a capsule isn't as important as the amount of trans-resveratrol—the bioactive form that seems to have all the benefit.

The higher quality resveratrol products on the market are "standardized" for a certain percentage of trans-resveratrol. "No one knows the correct dose in humans," says Houston, "but any amount should have health benefits." The smart money is betting that 250 milligrams or more of the trans-resveratrol form should have an effect on aging and health. For 500-milligram capsules standardized to 20 percent trans that would be two-and-a-half capsules per day, three just to be safe! ✦

product examples

ENZYMATIC THERAPY RESVERATROL FORTE is a high-potency supplement formulated with 100 percent trans-resveratrol, the most absorbable form.

RESERVEAGE ORGANICS WORLD'S FINEST RESVERATROL 250 MG is a potent combination of organic French red wine grapes and wild-crafted natural *Polygonum cuspidatum* root extract.

NATURE'S WAY RESVERATROL SYNERGIC FORMULA combines a comprehensive blend of antioxidants, including red wine and grape seed extracts, to protect cells against lipid peroxidation and free radicals.