



Glynis Barber *Why I love* astaxanthin

Our natural guru on the incredible benefits of this antioxidant

I have to confess I started taking this antioxidant

with its weird name purely for vanity reasons. About five years ago I began to hear about its powerful anti-ageing properties. There was talk of protection against collagen damage, wrinkles being reduced and freckles and age spots all but disappearing. I couldn't order it fast enough and I've been religiously taking it ever since.

Now it turns out that I may be getting a lot more than I actually bargained for. Astaxanthin is part of the carotenoid family (compounds that give foods their vibrant colours) and is now thought to be the most powerful antioxidant there is. It's derived from a microalgae and the only way to get some is to either take a supplement or to consume the fish that eat it (such as salmon, shrimps, lobster, crab and krill). Salmon gets its red colour from astaxanthin, as do flamingos. Did you know that baby flamingos are actually white and only get their pink colouring when they start consuming shrimp and algae?

Astaxanthin is how the algae protects itself from intense ultraviolet radiation and when you consume it, you are creating your own internal

sunscreen. It doesn't block UV rays thereby continuing to allow UVB to convert into vitamin D in your skin while still protecting against damage. Recent studies have shown that this powerful protection against sunburn is one of astaxanthin's most extraordinary traits.

But there are many more. The reason it is now thought to be the most potent antioxidant is because of its unique ability to deal with multiple free radicals at one time, possibly as many as 19. Other antioxidants, like vitamins C and E, can only handle one free radical at a time. Free radicals contribute to cell walls being broken down which can lead to DNA damage and even cause cancer in some cases. Its other unique trait is that it's able to protect both the fat and water soluble parts of the cell which means it can integrate into the cellular membrane of ALL cells. Another crucial feature is that it can't function as a pro-oxidant even in high doses which makes it very safe to take.

One of its other numerous benefits is that it's a powerful anti-inflammatory thereby helping to prevent chronic diseases and to relieve pain and discomfort. It also reduces levels of C-reactive protein which is a marker for heart disease, making it a powerful tool in improving heart and cardiovascular health. And if that's not enough, it's known to offer protection against age-related macular degeneration and age-related dementia too.

So that's settled then. My love of astaxanthin continues and yes, vanity is still high on the list of reasons why.

Glynis Barber is an actress, co-author of *The In-Sync Diet* and founder of agelessbyglynisbarber.com

HOW TO TAKE IT

Get the most of this important antioxidant...

1. Other than vitamin D, astaxanthin is probably one of the most important supplements to take. Start with 4mg a day and work up to 8mg. People who exercise a lot or suffer from chronic inflammation could take up to 12mg per day (krill oil supplements will contain some astaxanthin but the amount will be quite low).

2. Look for natural sources of astaxanthin as opposed to synthetic ones. For example, farmed salmon will be fed the synthetic version whereas wild salmon will be feeding on natural sources.

3. To optimise absorption of your astaxanthin supplement, take with a small amount of fat, e.g. butter, coconut oil, olive oil or eggs.

4. When going away on a sunny holiday, start taking an astaxanthin supplement at least two weeks before and continue for the whole trip. This will offer protection against sunburn and skin damage.

