

# Acai research

As a relatively new superfood discovery, acai has, as yet, relatively few published clinical studies. Most of the research that has been done has been investigations into acai's antioxidant capacity, especially the anthocyanin content.

One of the most quoted clinical studies was published earlier this year. A University of Florida research team found acai berries destroyed cultured

human cancer cells in vitro. This preliminary research points to a possible anti-cancer effect of anthocyanins and other pigments, which would be in line with what is known about blueberries. The university's research assistant professor Stephen Talcott said: "Acai berries are already considered one of the richest fruit sources of antioxidants... this was a cell-culture model and we don't want to give anyone false hope." But he added: "We are encouraged by the findings, however. Compounds that show good activity against cancer cells in a model system are most likely to have beneficial effects in our bodies."

The team is now conducting a second study, with humans, which is due to conclude late this year, and which is investigating the effect of acai berries' antioxidants on blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

In Brazil more research and development is being carried out with non-governmental organisations



and universities, and incorporating the promotion of sustained yield management of the Amazon basin acai forests.

Due to its rich content of anthocyanin pigments, acai is likely to be proven in future clinical research to bring about health benefits commonly associated with consuming antioxidant pigments. These include possible reduced risk of cancer and diabetes, cardiovascular benefits and blood cholesterol lowering, reduced risk of neuro degeneration, uses for urinary tract infections and age-related visual deterioration, and as an overall anti-ageing aid. After all, acai berries have an estimated 50-75 unidentified compounds, which may yet be shown to yield very specific health benefits.

