

SEPTEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER

Wouldn't it be great if we had some (fairly) comprehensive means of assessing one foods' overall nutritional value against others', some sort of Overall Nutritional Quality Index (ONQI)? Well fret no longer, the ONQI is here!

The ONQI is a tool developed at the Yale Griffin Prevention Research Center in an attempt to organize foods according to their relative overall nutritional value. Foods are rated on a 100-point scale, with foods considered to be overall healthier receiving higher scores.

In determining a foods' ONQI score, thirty factors with established relevance to health are considered, including vitamin, mineral, omega-3 fatty acid, bioflavonoid, carotenoid, saturated fat, trans-fat, cholesterol, salt and sugar levels; fat quality (relative amounts of saturated and unsaturated fat in a food) and protein quality (degree to which the food contains all essential amino acids); energy density (calories per unit of volume of the food); and glycemic load (effect consumption of the food has on blood-sugar levels). Amounts of each nutrient in each food are evaluated against the amounts found in a "healthy" diet. A "healthy" diet is defined based on recommendations found in Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), the U.S. Food and Drug Administrations' Nutrition Facts Panel findings, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's *MyPyramid* tool, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' 2005 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* document and other relevant international standards.

HEALTH TIP

When making choices at the grocery store, focus on foods with higher ONQI scores. Although selected grocery stores in the United States will soon be displaying ONQI scores of foods as a part of merchandising displays, no Canadian stores have plans to do this yet.

For Canadians, ONQI scores will soon be available at: www.ONQI.org. Of the foods we've seen so far on the list, there are few surprises. "Whole" foods, particularly fruits and vegetables rate highest on the index, and processed foods rate lower (so you don't need to wait to make healthy choices).

Foods with 100-point scores include blueberries, raw broccoli and spinach, green beans, oranges, mustard greens and fresh strawberries. Other foods with scores over 90 include pineapple, radishes, summer squash, apples, green cabbage, tomatoes, clementines, watermelon, mango, non-fat milk, fresh figs, grapes and bananas.

Foods with scores less than 10 include white bread, pepperoni, cheese calzones, salami, hot dogs, cheese puffs, milk chocolate, bacon, soda and popsicles.

IN THE NEWS ...

With the declaration that we will be having an election in October of this year, Bill C-51 has been "killed".

Bill C-51 has been on the minds of many users of natural medicines because it involves amending the Food and Drugs Act that presently dictates how natural medicines are regulated. Although opposition to Bill C-51 has been vociferous, there are definite benefits to the proposed legislation. Presently natural medicines are considered foods, not medicines. Bill C-51 was to provide for more stringent guidelines with respect to conditions under which natural medicines are manufactured and policing of "claims" made by manufactures as to the benefits offered by use of their product.

Concerns our industry had with respect to Bill C-51 include that small producers of excellent products who are very conscientious with respect to facility cleanliness, etc. may simply not be able to afford to meet the guidelines required by the government to manufacture "medicines". Also, only medical doctors (MDs) are by law allowed to dispense "medicines". To date only pharmaceuticals have been included in this definition, but if natural medicines were to be reclassified, it may affect naturopathic doctors' ability to prescribe nutritional supplements and herbal medicines, health stores ability to sell these products and your ability to buy them.

Anyway, that's the deal on Bill C-51. It is likely a similar bill (it will be called something else) will be re-introduced to the House of Commons in the future (as quality and "claims" controls are necessary in the industry) and the controversy will be renewed, but until then things will remain as they are.