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## **New study shows eating fruit more important than masculinity to male attractiveness**

Eating dark coloured fresh produce such as plums and nectarines has more impact on how attractive a man appears than his masculinity, according to new research.

Dr Ian Stephen of the University of Nottingham made the findings as part of his ongoing studies into effects on attractiveness of dietary carotenoids, such as those found in red or yellow fruit and vegetables. An earlier study showed that eating these pigments gave the skin a golden tone, and that men rated women who had this as the most attractive.

Dr Stephen said: "A new development in this area suggests that carotenoids might be even more important to our appearance than we previously thought. Whereas a feminine appearance is very important in determining the attractiveness of women, there has been debate amongst scientists about how important masculinity is for men. Our results suggest that the "golden" colour associated with carotenoids is actually more important than masculinity, and predicted how attractive women found men's faces."

Meanwhile, a group of fruit growers has put the findings of Dr Stephen's initial study on the attractiveness of women to the test. Hortgro Services in South Africa asked 65 women to eat one plum and one nectarine every day for two weeks, asking them before and after questions about how attractive they felt. The results were as follows:

- 45.3% felt more confident about their appearance than before eating the fruit
- 36% felt more attractive
- 68.8% felt that their complexion had improved and was brighter/had a more natural glow
- 53.1% noticed that the condition of their skin improved after eating the fruit
- Those who described their skin complexion as "clear" increased by 12.5% of the sample - from 20.3% to 32.8%
- Those who described their skin complexion as "dull" decreased by 25% of the sample - from 34.4% to 9.4%

"This study is a bit of fun," said Dr Stephen, "but its results make sense in the context of our research. Our results showed that people who eat more fruit and vegetables - especially those yellow and red fruit such as plums and

peaches, and green leafy veg like spinach, that contain high levels of red/yellow antioxidants - have a more "golden" skin tone. This tone seemed to have a much better effect on healthy appearance than a suntan."

He added that the antioxidant properties of the carotenoids that cause this golden skin colour are believed to be important in maintaining a strong immune system and a healthy reproductive system.

"Individuals who are eating plenty of fruit and vegetables with lots of carotenoids are getting the antioxidant benefits for their immune and reproductive systems," he said. "Other people can see that, viewing people with lots of golden carotenoid colour in their skin as healthier. Since healthy appearance is a huge part of attractiveness, it seems as though fruit and vegetables can make you more attractive, too."

In summary, Dr Stephen said: "In theoretical terms, these studies tell us two interesting things. First, when people look at faces, they automatically make a lot of judgements about that person. You can tell the person's age, their sex, or ethnic group. We also make judgements about how healthy and how attractive that person is. This research suggests that these health and attractiveness judgements might actually accurately reflect how healthy that person really is. Just from skin colour, we are getting information about individuals' immune and reproductive health, and about how healthy their diet is. And our brains take this information and use it to make a judgement about how healthy that person is.

"Secondly, this research seems to show that the mechanisms that we use to make judgements about health are the same as the mechanisms that animals as different to us as birds and fish are using. So we may be more similar to birds and fish than we think."

### **Notes to Editors**

- Dr Ian Stephen's original research was published in *Evolution and Human Behavior* and the *International Journal of Primatology*, with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council and the British Academy
- More information on these studies can be found at:  
[www.eatpigmentedfruit.com](http://www.eatpigmentedfruit.com)

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