What's Super About Superfoods?

Eating right is more than adding a handful of healthy foods to your diet or eliminating unhealthy ones, but rather the healthfulness of your entire diet – which should include a variety of foods. However, a few foods are truly "super" – packing more than their share of nutrients and phytochemicals that lower risk for diseases such as cancer and heart disease. In addition, many of these “superfoods” are low in calories and high in fiber, which can help with weight loss and weight maintenance.

Phytonutrients or phytochemicals are chemicals in plants (apart from vitamins, minerals, and macronutrients like proteins and carbohydrates) that have a beneficial effect on the body. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of phytochemicals in foods. Highly colored vegetables and fruits tend to be highest in these chemicals, but tea and nuts are also excellent sources.

What's one key thing superfoods have in common? They are all "real," i.e., unprocessed, foods.

Garlic

Why it's super:
Studies have shown that garlic may help to reduce cholesterol, have anti-inflammatory and anti-arthritic properties and contain sulfur compounds that may prevent heart disease.

How to include more in your diet and other advice:
- Studies have shown that crushing garlic cloves prior to cooking reduces the loss of garlic's healthful properties during cooking.
- Fresh garlic may inhibit the development of heart disease more than processed garlic.
- Look for cloves that are plump and smooth. Avoid those that have begun to sprout because they could be spoiled.
- Add chopped garlic when sautéing greens, such as spinach, kale, or rapini (also called broccoli rabe).
- Add chopped garlic to soups, stews, and pasta sauces.
- Roast potatoes with whole cloves of garlic, then puree them together with a bit of olive oil for garlic-mashed potatoes.
- Add a bit of finely minced garlic to salad dressings.

Oats

Why it's super:
Oats has been found to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and the phenolic compounds in oats have been found to inhibit the oxidation of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, which protects against the development of heart disease.
How to include more in your diet and other advice:

- Eat more oatmeal, which tastes better with a toasted flavor. You can enhance this flavor by cooking oatmeal in a nonstick pan over low heat until it’s slightly fragrant and darker. Take care not to burn it, though.

- Garnish oatmeal with raisins, dried cranberries, blueberries, or toasted nuts.

**Blueberries**

**Why they’re super:**
Studies have shown that blueberries increase insulin sensitivity,\(^9\) protect brain and memory health,\(^10\) and protect against oxidation, the principal cause of cellular damage.\(^11,12\)

**How to include more in your diet and other advice:**

- The best of the berries is in the pulp and seeds, so choose the whole fruit, not juice.

- Frozen berries are just as nutritious as fresh berries.

- Switch from ice cream to frozen blueberries for an after-dinner snack.

- Add berries to tossed salads, salsas and muffin batter.

- Briefly cook berries with a little sugar or other sweetener, lemon juice, and cornstarch, and use as a topping for pancakes, French toast, waffles, and ice cream.

**Nuts**

**Why they’re super:**
Multiple studies have found a moderate amount of nuts inhibits the development of heart disease.\(^13,14\) Limit yourself to about an ounce of nuts a day – about what fits in one layer on the palm of your hand.

**How to include more in your diet and other advice:**

- Use as a crunchy addition to oatmeal, salads, or yogurt.

- Because of their high concentrations of fats, nuts have a tendency to go rancid.

- In general, whole nuts keep better than pieces; unprocessed nuts keep better than processed ones; nuts in the shell keep better than shelled.

- Keep nuts in a cool place in a sealed container for up to four months. Keep in the fridge for about six months and in the freezer for up to a year.

- Dry-roasted or raw nuts are a good choice. Avoid nuts with added salt, oil or flavors.

**Green Tea**

**Why it’s super:**
Green tea may reduce the risk of heart disease\(^15\), stroke\(^16\) and cancer.\(^17\) Additionally, a compound in green tea called EGCG may support brain health and memory.\(^18\)
How to include more in your diet and other advice:

- Aim to drink at least two cups per day. Replace coffee drinks or sugary sodas with tea.
- Brewed tea offers more health benefits than instant tea. Brew tea for at least three minutes.

Sources Cited


