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What's In Your Pantry? The Top 8 Whole Food Items That Every Kitchen Needs!

May 1, 2014, by **Dr. B.J. Hardick**

A kitchen stocked with whole, fresh, organic, items is the foundation for ultimate health and full body nourishment. Families, couples and individuals in an ever so busy world often times find it a challenge to keep fresh food in their homes, which can lead to quick, on-the-go meal choices. Choosing easy, 'fast food' options as a result of an empty pantry is more harmful than you might guess. These quick choices will spike insulin levels, cause inflammation and put you (and your little ones!) in danger of long-term health risks like cancer and diabetes. So, what can you do to prevent the five o'clock dash to your local grocery store or fast food chain? It's simple. Fill your pantry with whole, accessible options that will fill your belly and sustain your system. Cravings and low blood sugar will diminish when you've prepared mindful options from a kitchen filled with fresh, whole items. Take time out on the weekend to visit your local fresh market, whole foods store, or whole foods section at your grocer and fill your basket with whole, nutrient dense options. Let's talk about my top eight suggestions that you should pick up for your kitchen, right now!

For the Refrigerator:

Fresh Salsa: Choose your fresh salsa mild to wild! This is a great option for dipping, topping on organic chicken or meats, dunking avocados or peppers, and spicing up a Saturday morning omelet. Be sure to purchase your salsa fresh and with no sugar added. This dynamic side is rich in vitamin C and D, and is a satisfying way to leave your stomach feeling full.

Spinach: This dark leafy green can be used at every meal, and they're typically the base for every green smoothie. There's always a way to sneak spinach into a meal, and your kids won't even know the difference. Toss it raw as a side onto all meals to maximize your vitamin D intake, which is best utilized through spinach. Vitamin D has many co-factors for its utilization, but they are all found in spinach. These greens can be eaten simply by sautéing them in olive oil and fresh lemon, or add them as a base into your green salad. Spinach is rich in antioxidants and high in iron and fiber. Keep this item in your refrigerator to optimize your health and increase energy.

Green Apples: Green apples are a quick and easy snack on the go. You can toss them into your gym bag or brief case and snack on them when you're feeling that three p.m. wall. Here's the added benefit: green apples are low glycemic. This means that they won't spike your blood sugar or leave you with cravings. Green apples are also high in fiber and vitamin C, which will maximize your digestive and immune system functioning. Chop them up and put them into green salads, eat them with almond butter as a snack, or add

them to your low glycemic desert options.

Eggs: Eggs are an ideal way to consume healthy fats and protein. They are jam-packed with nutrients and can be prepared in a variety of ways that are accessible to the entire family. Eggs are high in B12 vitamins, vitamin A and E, and are a great source of protein. For zero sugar options, prepare your eggs with turmeric, chili, carbonara sauce or fresh salsa. Egg whites can be added to any smoothie, omelet or baking recipe for optimal proteins and vitamins. Here's a tip: Eat the yolks! Just like Rocky Balboa, take a walk on the wild side and add eggs into smoothies, or consume the yolk whole. The yolk of an egg is filled with good fats and protein, and should not be discarded.

For the Pantry:

Cacao: Cacao is a not-so-secret super food. This treat is an anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and it's incredibly high in antioxidants. The list goes on and on when it comes to the benefits of consuming this whole food, including its ability to fight cardiovascular disease. Cacao is high in phytonutrients, fiber, and essential minerals and vitamins that your body needs for fuel. Keep this item in your pantry as a treat, to add into smoothies, or for savory sauces like mole or chili and chocolate sauce.

Black Beans: This pantry item, that is high in fiber, protein and antioxidants, is very versatile and can be prepared in several different ways. Be it black bean brownies, whole food soup, or a warm savory side dish, the complete protein can be used in many dishes and will keep you satiated. Black beans are highly beneficial to your health as they regulate blood sugar levels, prevent cancer, fight cardiovascular disease and keep your digestive tract healthy. If you're choosing the canned version of the pantry option, be sure to go organic to avoid toxins.

Sunflower Seeds: It's so easy to pack sunflower seeds in your children's school bag for a nutrient dense, nut free snack. They're a great staple to keep shelled, raw and in bulk in your pantry. Sunflower seeds are high in antioxidants, vitamin E and magnesium. Toss these seeds on salads, stuff them into red peppers, pre-soak them to create pates or hummus, or eat them raw on the go. For a delicious and different sunflower seed recipe, try 'Not Tuna Salad', which can be eaten in a wrap or on salad.

Coconut Oil: This pantry staple is not only delicious, it aids in the prevention of serious health problems like diabetes, cancer and Alzheimer's disease. Coconut oil also kills hunger! Just a tablespoon of the oil in smoothies, salads or wholesome cooked meals will reduce cravings and increase your metabolism. This oil is the best one to have around your kitchen for any cooking or frying that you may do, as it's least likely to denature. Try massaging your kale with coconut oil, or adding a tablespoon of it into your next green smoothie. It simply takes a little bit of weekly pre-planning to fill your kitchen with whole foods that will nourish your body. Individuals who pre-plan their meals, visit fresh markets to purchase produce and stock their pantries with nutrient dense foods are set up for a lifetime of optimal health and success. Start out with my top eight staples for your