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## Top 22 Foods to Add Years of Healthy Life

By Dr. Mercola | November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017

A foundational recommendation for healthy eating is simply to eat REAL food. To protect your health, I advise spending at least 90 percent of your food budget on whole foods, and only 10 percent, or less, on processed foods. This article will highlight 22 foods known for their potent health benefits.

As a quick aside, while food selection is foundational for health, it's important to realize that certain lifestyle choices have an equal if not greater impact. Four of the most important lifestyle strategies to protect your health are:

- **Fasting**; intermittent fasting and/or multiday water fasts
- **Sleep**. Every single organ in your body has a biological clock that needs to be synced to the master circadian clock in your brain. These body clocks regulate everything from metabolism to psychological functioning. Over the long term, skimping on sleep (which is a surefire way to dysregulate your circadian clock) can contribute to a whole host of chronic health problems
- **Sensible sun exposure**, as this is the primary and most efficient way to optimize your vitamin D level
- **Avoiding electromagnetic field exposure** from cellphones, tablets, routers, laptops and other electric and magnetic fields, as this radiation activates voltage-gated calcium channels in the membrane of your cells. As a result of this activation, extremely potent oxidant stressors and reactive free radicals are produced, capable of causing severe harm

### Top Six Foods for Your Brain

That said, let's return to the topic at hand. These are my top picks when it comes to foods that nourish your brain, heart, gut, muscles, immune system and more. Can you boost your brainpower with the foods you eat? You bet. Topping the list of brain-boosting superfoods are foods high in healthy fats. This should come as no surprise considering your brain is mainly made up of fats.

- 1. Avocados** are a great source of healthy oleic acid (monounsaturated fat, which is also found in olive oil), which helps decrease inflammation. Avocados have also been shown to effectively combat nearly every aspect of metabolic syndrome, a risk factor of dementia and most other chronic disease. Aside from providing healthy fats, avocados also provide nearly 20 essential nutrients, including potassium, which helps balance your vitally important potassium to sodium ratio.
- 2. Organic coconut oil**. Besides being excellent for your thyroid and your metabolism, its medium-chain fatty acids (MCTs) are a source of ketone bodies, which act as an alternate source of brain fuel that can help prevent the brain atrophy associated with dementia. MCTs also impart a number of health benefits, including raising your body's metabolism and fighting off pathogens.
- 3. Grass fed butter and ghee**. About 20 percent of butterfat consists of short- and medium-chain fatty acids, which are used right away for quick energy and therefore don't contribute to fat levels in your blood. Therefore, a significant portion of the butter you consume is used immediately for energy, similar to a carbohydrate. Ghee, which has a higher

smoke point than butter, is a healthy fat particularly well-suited for cooking. It also has a longer shelf life.

**4. Organic pastured eggs.** Many of the healthiest foods are rich in cholesterol and saturated fats, and eggs are no exception. Cholesterol is needed for the regulation of protein pathways involved in cell signaling and other cellular processes. It's particularly important for your brain, which contains about 25 percent of the cholesterol in your body.

**5. Wild-caught Alaskan salmon.** While most fish suffer drawbacks related to contamination, wild-caught Alaskan salmon and other small, fatty fish, such as sardines and anchovies, are still noteworthy for their health benefits in light of their low risk of contamination.

**6. Organic raw nuts such as macadamia and pecans.** Macadamia nuts have the highest fat and lowest protein and carb content of any nut, and about 60 percent of the fat is the monounsaturated fat oleic acid. This is about the level found in olives, which are well-known for their health benefits.

A single serving of macadamia nuts also provides 58 percent of what you need in manganese and 23 percent of the recommended daily value of thiamin. Pecans are a close second to macadamia nuts on the fat and protein scale, and they also contain anti-inflammatory magnesium, heart healthy oleic acid, phenolic antioxidants and immune-boosting manganese.

### Three Foods to Boost Your Heart Health

Like your brain, your heart needs healthy fats, so all of the foods just mentioned will benefit your heart as well. Aside from that, the following three are known for their cardiovascular benefits:

**1. Beets, raw or fermented.** Research shows beets have powerful health benefits, courtesy of their high nitrate content. Your body transforms nitrates into nitric oxide, which enhances oxygenation and blood flow and has a beneficial impact on your circulatory and immune systems. Research shows raw beet juice can lower blood pressure by an average of four to five points in just a few hours.

Since 36 percent of each beet is simple sugars, if you have diabetes or are insulin resistant, fermented beets, also known as beet kvass, would be a preferable option, as the fermentation significantly reduces the sugar content. Beet kvass is also a great source of healthy probiotics.

**2. Arugula,** a relative of the cruciferous family of vegetables, contains flavonoids known to help improve blood vessel function, increase blood flow, lower blood pressure and lower inflammation.

Arugula even has cleansing properties to counteract the poisoning effects of heavy metals in the system, particularly in the liver, and helps eliminate pesticides and herbicides from your body. With a tangy, slightly peppery kick, arugula is a tasty addition to just about any meal.

**3. Sprouts, microgreens and baby greens.** Harvesting greens before they reach maturity results in nutrient-dense plant foods that allow you to eat less in terms of volume. A simple way to dramatically improve your nutrition is to simply swap out lettuce for sprouts and/or microgreens in your salad — or on burgers, sandwiches or tacos.

According to research by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in which 25 different microgreens were evaluated, all were found to have higher nutritional densities than their full-grown counterparts, including 10 times higher amounts of valuable antioxidant compounds.

As noted in "Microgreens: Novel, Fresh and Functional Food to Explore All the Value of Biodiversity," even a few grams of microgreens per day can "entirely satisfy" the recommended daily intake of vitamins C, E and K, based on recommendations by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). Vitamin K, both K1 and K2, are particularly important for health and cardiovascular health.

## Four Foods to Get Your Gut Health on Track

Mounting evidence reveals there's more to nutrition than previously thought — a large component of it actually revolves around nourishing the health-promoting bacteria in your body, thereby keeping harmful microbes in check. One of the reasons a healthy diet is able to influence your health is by the fact that it helps create an optimal environment for beneficial bacteria in your gut, while decreasing pathogenic or disease-causing bacteria, fungi and yeast. Among the top contenders in this category are:

**1. Raw, grass fed kefir.** This cultured milk product, which is easy to make at home with raw grass fed milk, is loaded with probiotics. It also contains fiber, which is another important source of nourishment for the healthy bacteria in your gut.

**2. Fermented vegetables.** One of the best and least expensive ways to optimize your gut microbiome is to eliminate sugars and processed sugars and eat traditionally fermented foods. Kefir is one; fermented vegetables are another. Here you have plenty of choices, as you can easily ferment just about any vegetable you like.

**3. Organic bone broth.** Bone broth is quite possibly one of the oldest meals on record, going back to the Stone Age. It may also be one of the most healing. Not only is it very easily digested, it also contains profound immune-optimizing components that are foundational building blocks for the treatment of leaky gut and autoimmune diseases.

This includes but is not limited to bioavailable minerals, collagen, silicon, components of bone and bone marrow, glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate and the conditionally essential amino acids proline, glycine and glutamine. However, if you choose this food you must be absolutely certain it is organic, as nonorganic bone broth may be worse than junk food. Bone broth is best made at home from scratch, using organic grass fed bones.

**4. Organic psyllium.** Psyllium is a healthy dietary fiber that helps nourish healthy bacteria in your gut, reduces intestinal inflammation, and may provide some relief from irritable bowel syndrome. The recommended daily amount of fiber is between 20 and 30 grams, but I believe about 50 grams per 1,000 calories consumed is ideal.

## Two Potent Anti-Inflammatory Spices

While several of the foods already listed could belong in this section, two potent anti-inflammatory spices worthy of special mention are:

**1. Turmeric,** nicknamed the "spice of life," has a long history of medicinal use for Ayurvedic medicine and traditional Chinese medicine. Its bioactive compound, curcumin, has been found to help maintain a healthy digestive system, modulate some 700 genes, positively control more than 160 different physiological pathways, improve the orderliness of cell membranes, and directly interact with inflammatory molecules to help lower inflammation.

**2. Ginger** is also well-known for its medicinal qualities. The Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences recently published a review showing ginger may protect against a wide range of chronic diseases, in part due to its beneficial effects on oxidative stress and inflammation.

Like turmeric, ginger has also been found to have anticancer activity, driving "mitochondrially mediated apoptosis" (programmed cell death), decreasing the size of prostate tumors without disturbing normal tissues.

## Two Immune-Boosting Superfoods

Your immune system is the first-line defense against all disease, and a majority of your immune function resides or starts in your gut. Hence, all the gut-healthy foods already mentioned will help boost your immune function as well. In addition to those, the following two categories are worthy of special note:

**1. Allium vegetables — garlic and onions.** The unique scent emitted by allium vegetables when cut comes from sulfur-containing compounds such as allicin, which have many health-promoting effects. Studies have demonstrated

garlic may inhibit a vast array of diseases by reducing inflammation, boosting immune function and improving cardiovascular health.

It's also been shown to combat at least 14 different kinds of cancer cells, including brain, lung, breast, gastric and pancreatic cancer cells. Sprouted garlic and fermented, black garlic are two variations you can try for variety's sake as well. Both have been shown to provide additional health benefits over regular, fresh garlic.

Onions also have a wealth of beneficial properties; they're antiallergic, antihistaminic, anti-inflammatory and antioxidant all rolled into one. Polyphenols are plant compounds recognized for their disease prevention, antioxidant and antiaging properties, and onions have a particularly high concentration of them.

Onions are especially rich in polyphenol flavonoids called quercetin, a powerful antioxidant with antihistamine and anti-inflammatory properties that may help fight chronic diseases like allergies, heart disease and cancer.

**2. Mushrooms.** Aside from being rich in protein, fiber, vitamins B and C, calcium and minerals, mushrooms are excellent sources of antioxidants, including antioxidants that are unique to mushrooms, such as ergothioneine, recognized as a "master antioxidant." A study in the journal *Nature* discussed the importance of ergothioneine, which appears to have a very specific role in protecting your DNA from oxidative damage.

Some of the most potent immunosupportive agents are also found in mushrooms, which is one reason why they're so beneficial for both preventing and treating cancer. Long-chain polysaccharides, particularly alpha and beta glucan molecules, are primarily responsible for the mushrooms' beneficial effect on your immune system.

In human nutrition intervention studies, dried shiitake mushrooms were found to have a beneficial, modulating effect on immune system function.

## **Two Muscle-Boosting Superfoods**

Proteins are found in every cell in your body. These chains of amino acids are important for repair, maintenance and growth of cells, and are essential for healthy muscles, organs, glands and skin. As protein is broken down and used up in your body, you must replace it by consuming protein via your diet. There's no question that eating enough high-quality protein is essential to good health, but many Americans tend to eat far more than they need.

Excessive protein can have a stimulating effect on a biochemical pathway called the mammalian target of rapamycin (mTOR). This pathway has an important and significant role in many cancers. When you reduce protein to just what your body needs, mTOR remains inhibited, which helps minimize your chances of cancer growth.

So, remember, there appears to be a Goldilocks' Zone when it comes to protein. You want just enough — not too much and not too little — and your individual requirement will vary depending on your age, sex, physical activity and more. As a general rule, most people likely need about one-half gram of protein per pound of LEAN body mass. To calculate your lean body mass, simply subtract your percent body fat from 100, then multiply that percentage by your current weight.

Next, multiply your lean body mass by 0.5 to get your approximate protein requirement in grams. Seniors, pregnant women and athletes generally need about 25 percent more than the general population. When it comes to protein-rich, muscle-boosting foods, quality also matters. Two of the top contenders here are:

**1. Grass fed beef.** Compared to conventional beef from animals raised in concentrated animal feeding operations, grass fed beef tends to have significantly better omega-6 to omega-3 ratios, higher concentrations of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) and antioxidants, and a lower risk of being contaminated with antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

When buying meat, be sure to look for the American Grassfed Association's certification mark. At present, this is the only logo able to guarantee the meat comes from animals that have been fed a 100 percent forage diet, never been

confined to a feedlot, never received antibiotics or hormones, and have been raised on an American farm (i.e., the meat is not imported).

**2. Whey protein**, a byproduct of milk and cheese (often referred to as the gold standard of protein), was promoted for its health benefits by Hippocrates as early as 420 B.C. Besides providing all of the essential amino acids your body needs, high-quality whey protein from organically raised grass fed cows also contains three ingredients of particular importance for health: leucine, glutathione and CLA.

Both leucine and CLA can be helpful if you're trying to lose weight, while glutathione boosts your overall health by protecting your cells and mitochondria from oxidative and peroxidative damage. As with beef, make sure your whey protein is certified organic and derived from grass fed cows, and is minimally processed with no added sugars and preservatives.

### **Three Anticancer Foods to Eat More Of**

Many previously mentioned foods also belong in this section as well. Three additional foods with potent chemoprotective activity that many don't eat enough of are:

**1. Broccoli (and other cruciferous vegetables).** Broccoli has definitely earned its place among chemoprotective foods, thanks to plant compounds such as sulforaphane, glucoraphanin, phenolic compounds and diindolylmethane (DIM). Studies have shown sulforaphane causes apoptosis (programmed cell death) in colon, prostate, breast and tobacco-induced lung cancer cells.

Three servings of broccoli per week may reduce your risk of prostate cancer by more than 60 percent. It's also an anti-inflammatory, and encourages production of enzymes capable of reducing reactive oxygen species by as much as 73 percent.

Glucoraphanin also influences the process of carcinogenesis and mutagenesis, while phenolic compounds have a potent ability to eliminate damaging free radicals and quell inflammation. DIM also has multiple potential benefits, including boosting your immune system and helping to prevent or treat cancer.

To really optimize these benefits, be sure to eat your cruciferous veggies with some organic mustard seed powder. If you don't like broccoli, keep in mind that many, if not most, of the members of the cruciferous family have similar plant compounds and health benefits.

**2. Leeks**, an allium vegetable closely related to onions and garlic, have much to offer in the way of good health. Like garlic, many of its therapeutic effects come from its sulfur-containing compounds, such as allicin. Leeks also contain kaempferol, a natural flavonol also found in broccoli, kale and cabbage, which research has linked to a lower risk of cancer.

**3. Black cumin**, also known as black seed (*Nigella Sativa*), has at least 20 different pharmacological actions, including natural antibacterial properties, antioxidant, renal protective and gastro-protective properties. Some have even called it a "seed of blessing" because it provides protection against both heart disease and cancer.