

THE 10 HEALTHIEST FOODS ON THE PLANET

BY MARY MURRAY

Eating well is a skill cultivated throughout life. Want to live to be 100? Want to look great? Want to feel alive? Then you must consume a nutrient-rich, fresh and fortifying diet. With this in mind, we went on a mission to find the 10 healthiest foods on the planet. Goodbye, trendy tastes; move over, health crazes—these foods have stood the test of time and possess the necessary attributes to be deemed the healthiest.

How did we narrow it down to 10? We consulted with local nutritionists and dieticians and then married their advice and expertise with scientific research and nutritional information. Of course, there are many foods we could have included (where are the chia seeds?!), but these 10 simple, whole and unprocessed foods—presented in no particular order—will help jump-start your healthy eating routine.

KALE PESTO, DIANNA MUSCARI, THE KITCHEN PREP BLOG

1 KALE

“Kale is one of the most nutrient-dense foods out there,” explains Courtney Burke, a certified nutrition consultant and healthy eating specialist at Whole Foods in Palm Beach Gardens. While leafy green vegetables are awesome as a whole, kale is among the best—as evidenced by its deep green color. “The color of your food can tell you so much about its nutritional benefits,” says Rebecca Berman, a registered dietician and licensed nutritionist at Palm Beach Dietetics.

BENEFITS:

Indole-3-carbinol: This natural substance protects DNA and has antioxidant benefits, notes Elyse Marrone, a registered dietitian nutritionist and past president of the Palm Beach Dietetic Association.

Alpha-linolenic acid: ALA is “an essential fatty acid that supports healthy brain function,” Burke explains.

Lutein and zeaxanthin: These carotenoids promote healthy eyes and protect against macular degeneration.

HOW TO INCORPORATE: “Kale isn’t just for salads—it has a variety of uses and is surprisingly simple to incorporate into your daily diet,” Burke says. She recommends adding it to a morning smoothie, tossing it into a soup or lightly steaming it for a side dish.

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2

BROCCOLI

As a member of the healthful cruciferous family, broccoli boasts a number of minerals and antioxidants. “All the cruciferous vegetables in general, like cauliflower, brussels sprouts, broccoli, cabbage—that whole family—are excellent for you,” Berman says.

BENEFITS:

Sulforaphane: Many studies indicate that this compound has anti-cancer benefits.

Folate: A form of vitamin B, folate helps make red blood cells, synthesize and repair DNA and prevent anemia.

EAT IT BECAUSE: The phytonutrients in broccoli have anti-inflammatory properties, making it perfect for detox diets. “A lot of people don’t realize that inflammation is actually the cause of a lot of conditions,” Berman says. “A lot of diseases start with having inflammation in your body.”

4

BLUEBERRIES

Though all berries have health benefits, blueberries are at the top of the pack. “Blueberries are in a different class because of that deep blue color,” says Dr. Fatma Huffman, head of Florida International University’s dietetics and nutrition department.

BENEFITS:

Anthocyanin: This flavonoid provides the blueberry’s vivid color and has anti-inflammatory and anti-carcinogenic properties.

Vitamin C: The nutrient can lower the risk of many types of cancer as well as cardiovascular diseases.

Vitamin A: This is essential for healthy vision.

EAT IT BECAUSE: The abundance of antioxidants makes this fruit beneficial to combat diseases like heart disease, cancer and macular degeneration. “The antioxidants found in blueberries help to protect cells and promote healthy aging,” Burke says.



3

AVOCADO

“Avocados are the complete package, containing fiber, protein and over 20 essential nutrients,” Burke says. In addition to omega-3 fatty acids, this fruit has monounsaturated fat, potassium and vitamins A, C and E.

BENEFITS:

Potassium: An avocado has more potassium than a banana. “Potassium is considered an electrolyte and it’s really important for muscle function,” Berman says.

Monounsaturated fats: These healthy fats decrease the risk of heart disease and improve blood cholesterol.

HOW TO INCORPORATE: The recommended serving size is 1/5 of the avocado, or one ounce; this contains 50 calories and all of the vitamins and minerals.



5

QUINOA

This gluten-free grain is the overachiever of functional foods and a better choice than its carby cousins. "You're getting more fiber, good antioxidants, more protein and better blood-sugar control, so it's a win all around," Marrone says.

BENEFITS:

Protein: "Quinoa is a complete protein, containing all of the essential amino acids," Burke says. Protein repairs cells, makes new ones and is vital for growth, especially during childhood, adolescence and pregnancy, according to the National Institutes of Health.

Magnesium: One of the amino acids contained in the grain, magnesium builds bones and regulates heartbeat.

EAT IT BECAUSE: Every vegetarian has been asked, "But where do you get your protein?" Quinoa has a protein content of 15 percent and also contains fiber and iron, making it ideal for vegetarian diets.

FARMER'S TABLE BOCA RATON, GEORGY PAPP, PAPP PHOTOGRAPHY



6

WALNUTS

If you're going to go nuts over one nut, make it the walnut. It has more antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids than any other nut, Burke says. "Just one serving [one ounce or 14 shelled halves] of walnuts contains 90 percent of the recommended daily value of omega-3s," she says.

BENEFITS:

Omega-3 fatty acids: These polyunsaturated fatty acids promote and maintain good health, prevent heart disease, and attack and reduce the risk of stroke.

Vitamin E: According to the Mayo Clinic, vitamin E may help stop development of plaques in arteries, a common cause of coronary artery disease.

EAT IT BECAUSE: Omega-3 fatty acids support heart health, but a study in the journal *Neurology* also found they may protect against premature aging of the brain and middle-age memory problems.



SALMON TARTARE, PB CATCH

7

WILD SALMON

Like walnuts, wild salmon is packed with omega-3 fatty acids. "The omega-3 fatty acids are key; you really want to get between one to two grams a day if you're healthy," Marrone says. Wild salmon also has protein, vitamin D and minerals including calcium and iron.

BENEFITS:

DHA and EPA: These omega-3s "promote healthy brain function, especially in children," Burke says.

Protein: Protein is a building block for our bodies. "It's needed for hair, muscles, skin, organs, energy—it does a lot of important things," Berman says.

Iron: The mineral supports metabolism and is essential for normal cellular functioning.

HOW TO INCORPORATE: Our nutrition experts agree that to reap these benefits, you must consume wild salmon, as opposed to farm raised. Compared to the latter, the former is higher in omega-3 fatty acids. And, as Marrone notes, farm-raised salmon has 40 times the amount of PCBs, the synthetic chemical compound polychlorinated biphenyl.

8

GREEN TEA

Green tea is hailed worldwide for its health benefits. "There's a lot of research on green tea because there are some phytochemicals, some antioxidants," Huffman says. Like many of our super foods, it is rich in antioxidants, but what sets it apart is its concentration of epigallocatechin gallate, or EGCG.

BENEFITS:

EGCG: This potent antioxidant has been shown to prevent cardiovascular disease and can help lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart attack and stroke. "It's very good for blood flow in general and any condition that's related to having good flow," Berman says.

Catechins: These polyphenols, the most potent of which is EGCG, may be relevant to cancer prevention, according to the National Cancer Institute.

DRINK IT BECAUSE: Green tea has been used to prevent cancers including breast, stomach and skin, according to NIH. If you have a genetic predisposition for these cancers, consider incorporating green tea into your daily diet.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FAR LEFT: QUINOA CAN BE USED IN MANY FORMS, LIKE IN THIS QUINOA-VEGGIE COLLARD WRAP FROM THE FARMER'S TABLE IN BOCA RATON.

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9

COCONUT OIL

Though once discouraged for its relatively high calorie count and saturated fats, coconut oil has recently gained positive attention as some studies now indicate it might increase good cholesterol. However, always opt for virgin or refined coconut oil—never hydrogenated.

BENEFITS:

Lauric Acid: This medium-chain fatty acid can improve levels of HDL, or "good," cholesterol. It is also good for the gut, according to Marrone.

Beauty: A natural moisturizer, virgin coconut oil can be used as body lotion or on the scalp for hair health.

Energy: Coconut oil is "converted very quickly into energy, so for athletes it's a great fat," Marrone says.

HOW TO INCORPORATE: Coconut oil can be used in place of butter in vegan baking recipes. And, given its high smoke point, it works well for sautéing and cooking.



TURMERIC IS GROWN IN BOTH ASIA AND AFRICA, BUT SOME U.S. FARMERS ARE STARTING TO GROW IT DUE TO THE HIGH DEMAND.

10

TURMERIC

The Asian spice turmeric has been used in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine for centuries, to treat everything from heartburn to stomach ulcers. Recent studies have indicated turmeric possesses antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties. "Turmeric supports a healthy immune system and contains important enzymes that aid in digestion and detoxification," Burke says.

BENEFITS:

Curcumin: An active ingredient in turmeric, this antioxidant has shown anti-cancer effects in laboratory studies and is anti-inflammatory.

HOW TO INCORPORATE: Turmeric can be enjoyed beyond traditional Indian recipes. Burke suggests steeping turmeric root in hot water with lemon and honey to make a calming tea. ◀

HEALTHY TREATS

With such an allegiance to healthy eating, you deserve to indulge once in a while. Try one of these health-enriching options:

Red wine: Many studies have cited the heart-healthy benefits of red wine. "Resveratrol is what we're looking at for the benefits," Marrone says. It is believed this antioxidant reduces LDL ("bad") cholesterol, thereby preventing blood clots and reducing the risk of heart disease. As with all indulgences, portion is important; a serving size is one four-ounce glass for women and two four-ounce glasses for men.

Dark chocolate: This sinfully delicious treat might not be so sinful. Dark chocolate contains flavonoids, which have positive impacts on vascular health. And, of course, chocolate makes you feel good. "When you eat chocolate, it actually produces endorphins in your body, which has mood-elevating effects," Berman says. When choosing a chocolate, make sure to select one with a high cocoa content, as the benefits lie in the cocoa.

