



IN OUR FARMER'S MARKET and produce section, right out in the open for all to see, is what some call a "miracle drug"—food that helps prevent illness and keeps the body at its healthiest.

Today, heaps of research show that a more plant-based diet of natural, whole foods is the way to go for optimum health. From books like "The Omnivore's Dilemma" to documentary films like "Forks Over Knives," we are seeing the benefits of consuming natural foods, mostly fruits and vegetables.

It makes perfect sense, but given all the tasty processed food around us, often it's not easy to choose an apple over a quick bag of chips. Thankfully, there are so many delicious preparations of fresh foods today that it's becoming more the norm to eat healthy.

What is a Superfood?

By now, many of us have heard the term *superfood*. But what are these fantastic edibles exactly? Is it just a marketing ploy? The "Oxford Dictionary" defines superfood as: "a nutrient-rich food considered to be especially beneficial for health and well-being."

"Generally speaking, a plant-based diet is one of the healthiest ways to eat, so from that perspective, I'd say all plant foods are superfoods," Susan Bowerman, MS, RD, CSSD, Assistant Director, UCLA Center for Human Nutrition and co-author of "What Color is Your Diet?," said.

In common use today, a superfood is typically a whole food (think one ingredient) that is not processed in any way.

It's a Bird! It's a Plane! It's Superfood!

Full of antioxidants, phytonutrients and phytoflavonoids, these food choices mean healthy eats.

BY LISA LUBIN



"They have high concentrations of vitamins and minerals, but also of natural phytonutrients that have various properties, such as antioxidant properties or anti-inflammatory properties," Bowerman explained. (Phytonutrients are, according to Webster.com, "bioactive plant-derived compounds associated with positive health effects").

Susan Edgar Helm, Ph.D., RD, Associate Professor & Coordinator, Nutritional Science, at Pepperdine University agreed. "The idea of superfoods is that they are the perfect antidote to oxidative stress."

These foods are said to prevent or reduce inflammation, help regulate metabolism and burn body fat, lower total cholesterol, lower blood pressure and help protect against heart disease, cancer and toxins. Plus, they have the added bonus of having relatively few calories per bite.

"In Malibu, the only place you could find organic fruits and vegetables twenty years ago was a little stand at John's Garden on Cross Creek. Now [we have] entire grocery stores dedicated to these superfoods," Estel Day, the co-owner of Plate restaurant, said. "At the restaurant, we believe that eating healthy should not be a sacrifice so every meal is tasty and bursting with flavor."

Our Choice for the Top Ten Superfoods

Of course, there are more than just ten superfoods. In fact, just about every brightly colored fruit and vegetable fits the category, as do nuts, beans, seeds and aromatic and brightly colored herbs and spices.

Dark Leafy Greens like Kale, Collards, Spinach and Broccoli

"Kale is one of my personal favorites," Day said. Kale is a staple in many juices, and looks similar to lettuce, but is in the same family as cabbage, collards and Brussels sprouts. This pre-historic-looking green is packed full of fiber and vitamins like A and C, calcium and cancer-fighting phytonutrients. Choose "green" for superior and healthy foods—add them into cooking

dishes (spinach is always an easy add-in) or munchy snacks such as raw broccoli. It really is easy being green!

Wild Salmon and Other Fish

Tasty wild salmon is low in calories, very high in protein and contains large amounts of essential omega-3 fatty acids that are most prevalent in fatty, cold-water fish like salmon, herring, sardines and mackerel. These superfoods have the added benefit of being high in monounsaturated fats, which can lower cholesterol.

Apples

The old adage still holds true. This fruit's four to five grams of fiber not only help fill you up, but apples are also a powerful source of antioxidants and vitamin C, as well as a good source of potassium. The secret behind the super antioxidant capacity of the apple is its skin. Alone it provides two to six times the antioxidant activity of the rest of the fruit. How about them apples?

Quinoa

A complete protein, quinoa (pronounced KEEN-wa) has all the essential amino acids needed to build muscle. Quinoa comes from the seed of a plant that is related to spinach. Its secret is that it contains the amino acid lysine, which is lacking in most grains. Quinoa is tasty and versatile and can be used in place of rice or pasta in creating salads and many dishes.

Lentils & Legumes

For thousands of years, beans and lentils have been and continue to be one of the most nutritious foods available. The beneficial phytochemicals found in beans—including common beans (kidney, black, navy, pinto), chickpeas (garbanzo beans), soybeans, dried peas and lentils—along with their multifaceted nutrition and prevention powers make them an anti-aging, dietary necessity. Beans are low in fat (except for soybeans), calories and sodium, and high in complex carbohydrates, protein and fiber. Plus they're cheap and easy to find. Cool beans!

Yogurt

Lowfat and nonfat Greek and regular yogurts contain twenty percent or more

of your daily calcium needs. And now evidence continues to build about probiotics (cultures like *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, present in many yogurts). These living organisms (think good bacteria) may boost the immune system and improve digestion. It's best to choose a low fat yogurt with live cultures and not the fruit-on-the-bottom sugary kind.

Kiwi

Kiwis are said to be among the most nutritionally dense fruits. A large kiwi has more than one day's quota of vitamin C. They are also a good source of potassium, fiber and a decent source of vitamins A and E. Even better—they are easy to eat as they come with their own cup; just slice in half, spoon out and enjoy.

Buckwheat

While it is not a true grain (it's actually the seed of a plant related to rhubarb), buckwheat is used like one in cooking, and it surpasses rice, wheat and corn on almost every measure of healthfulness. Roasted buckwheat groats known as kasha—a staple food in Eastern Europe—are dark brown with a nutty flavor. Protein-rich buckwheat is high in the essential amino acids lysine and arginine, in which major cereal crops are deficient.

Blueberries

The deep blue color of this aptly named fruit is what makes it so special. The hue is a by-product of phytoflavonoids, natural compounds that protect from the damaging effects of oxidation and inflammation. The tiny berries are also high in potassium and vitamin C, and can lower your risk of heart disease and cancer. That's pretty super!

Dark Chocolate

New research has shown that dark chocolate is packed with antioxidants and can lower blood pressure. The darker the better (look for seventy percent cacao or higher), which contains less added sugar and fat. Now this is our kind of superfood! ■



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