



Nutrition

Top 10 Super-Nutritious Foods

Improve your family's eating habits by including the following "superfoods" in your weekly meal plans.

Want to improve your family's nutrition? Though no one food can work magic, the following foods (or groups of foods) are packed with healthy fats, lots of fiber, and loads of vitamins and antioxidants. Benefit everyone's health by adding them to your shopping list. Then be sure to serve them to your loved ones on a regular basis.

Avocados

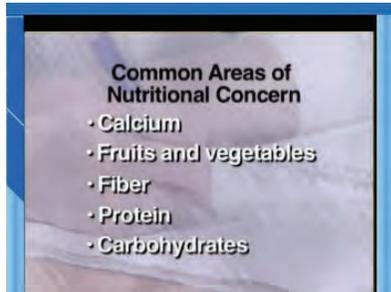
Aside from the occasional guacamole or Cobb salad, many people avoid avocados because of their high fat content. But the type of fat in this luscious fruit is the heart-healthy monounsaturated type. Avocados are also a rich source of fiber (7 grams in half a medium-size fruit), vitamins E, C, B-6, folate, K, and potassium.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Spread avocado on whole-grain toast. Sprinkle with a small amount of low-fat cheese. Melt the cheese in a toaster oven and add sliced tomato.
- ▶ Dice avocado into salads or slice it into sandwiches.
- ▶ Cut an avocado in half, remove the pit, and sprinkle the avocado with lemon juice and pepper. Eat the avocado out of the shell.
- ▶ Mash avocado with salsa for a quick dip.

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[Test Your Nutrition Intuition](#)

[Fat Facts: Fat or Fiction](#)

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[Work with a Dietitian](#)

Apples

Don't think of apples as a super food? You may not know they are a rich source of many antioxidants as well as vitamin C. Along with pears and berries, they are also one of the highest-fiber fruits. Just remember to leave their skin on.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Chop and toss apples into a green salad.
- ▶ Slice an apple and serve it with a dollop of natural peanut butter.
- ▶ Dice and mix an apple into hot oatmeal while cooking.
- ▶ Bake a whole apple in the oven for a "baked apple."

Barley

Barley is an often overlooked whole grain. Its high soluble fiber content makes it desirable for helping to prevent heart disease and manage blood sugars. Be sure to look for hulled barley, which retains most of the bran and germ of the whole grain. Pearled barley is more refined and not as nutritious.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Use barley in soups such as mushroom barley and lentil barley.
- ▶ Make barley into a warm pilaf.
- ▶ Use barley as the base for a cold salad tossed with an olive oil vinaigrette.
- ▶ Use barley mixed with raisins and nuts as a hot cereal.

Berries

Berries are a great source for antioxidants as well as vitamin C and potassium. They also contain higher amounts of fiber than most other fruits.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Mix berries with yogurt or cottage cheese. Add a small handful of crushed nuts.
- ▶ Add fresh or frozen berries to smoothies.
- ▶ Toss berries into cold or hot cereal.

Leafy greens

Greens make up a family that includes spinach, collards, kale, bok choy, arugula, and romaine. Leafy greens have the distinction of being the most nutrient-dense veggies for the least amount of calories. They are also good sources of calcium, potassium, folate, fiber, iron, magnesium, B vitamins, vitamin C, and vitamin K.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Sauté leafy greens with a small amount of olive oil, garlic, and chicken broth.

- ▶ Use a variety of dark and light lettuces in salads.
- ▶ Chop greens and add to soups.
- ▶ Use greens in stir-fries.

Omega-3 rich fish

Eating fish (especially fatty fish high in omega-3) at least two times a week may help cut your risks for heart disease and stroke. Studies are also underway to see its effect on Alzheimer's and arthritis. Choose wild salmon, herring, sardines, and mackerel.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Brush salmon with a mixture of orange juice and orange marmalade. Bake until done.
- ▶ Flake cooked salmon into whole-grain pasta mixed with peas, olive oil, salt, and Parmesan.
- ▶ Mash sardines with hard-boiled eggs and light mayo, and serve with whole-grain crackers.

Beans (includes beans, split peas, and lentils)

Beans combine the dynamic duo of protein and fiber. Specifically, they are high in soluble fiber, a type of fiber that can lower your risk for heart disease and help control blood sugars. Other noteworthy nutrients include B vitamins, iron, magnesium, potassium, and zinc. Beans are also surprisingly high in calcium.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Add rinsed canned beans to your favorite salad.
- ▶ Use beans in soups like black or navy bean, lentil, or split pea.
- ▶ Use beans in chilis.



Mushrooms

Mushrooms may not seem like they have much to offer on the nutrition front. But they are loaded with vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Several potential cancer-fighting substances have also been found in shiitake mushrooms. Purified forms of these substances are being studied to see their effect on stomach and colorectal cancer. More research is needed.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Sauté mushrooms with a small amount of olive oil along with onions and zucchini. Add them to your favorite tomato sauce for a heart-healthy pasta topping.
- ▶ Slice fresh mushrooms into salads.
- ▶ Sauté and combine mushrooms with barley for a hearty mushroom barley soup.

Nuts and Seeds

Nuts and seeds are good sources of monounsaturated fat. These fats can help lower your cholesterol if you substitute them for saturated fats. The protein, fiber, and healthy fat content of nuts and seeds provide a feeling

of being full that can keep you from overeating. Nuts contain magnesium, vitamin E, fiber, riboflavin, iron, calcium, and vitamin E.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Toast a whole-grain English muffin and spread with low-fat cream cheese. Top it with a handful of crushed walnuts or slivered almonds.
- ▶ Toss nuts or seeds into cold or hot cereal.
- ▶ Grab a small handful of nuts or seeds along with a piece of fruit for a snack.
- ▶ Mix nuts or seeds into cooked brown rice along with dried cranberries for a tropical side dish treat.

Pomegranates

Pomegranates can be a little tricky to eat, but they're well worth the effort. Pomegranates have up to three times the antioxidants of red wine and green tea. They are also rich in vitamin C and potassium.

Recipe tips:

- ▶ Toss the seeds into a green salad or a fruit salad.
- ▶ Mix them into yogurt.
- ▶ Add them to cooked oatmeal.

USDA's MyPlate Food Guide

MyPlate is an updated version of the old food pyramid. It offers a more practical visual for consumers. Read on for more details.

Following recommended dietary guidelines just got easier. The USDA has created a new visual called "MyPlate" to help you make healthy, balanced food choices. "MyPlate" replaces the 19-year-old "MyPyramid" which used stripes to identify different food groups. By using an actual plate as a visual, experts say the new icon is a more realistic and practical tool than the food pyramid.

Referring to MyPlate (ChooseMyPlate.gov) can help you prioritize your food choices. The icon features a plate split into 4 sections:

- ▶ Fruits
- ▶ Vegetables
- ▶ Grains

- ▶ Protein
- ▶ A cup, representing dairy, is off to the side.

The breakdown reminds you to make half of your plate fruits and vegetables. It also highlights the other important food groups for a well-balanced meal: whole grains, lean proteins, and low-fat dairy.

The food groups

MyPlate offers tips about each food group – all color-coded. Here is a summary:

Green/vegetables

This group, which makes up the largest block on the plate, includes any vegetable or 100-percent vegetable juice. The items can be raw, cooked, fresh, frozen, canned, or dried.



- ▶ Vegetables are organized into 5 subgroups based on nutrient content. Included are dark green, starchy, red and orange, beans and peas, and “others.”
- ▶ The more varied your choices, the more nutritious your diet will be.

Red/fruits

Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried, and may be whole, cut-up, or puréed. Any fruit or 100-percent fruit juice counts as a fruit.

- ▶ Vary your fruit choices. Fruits differ in nutrient content.
- ▶ When eating canned fruits, select fruit canned in 100-percent fruit juice or water rather than syrup.
- ▶ Choose whole or cut-up fruit rather than juice to get the extra benefits of dietary fiber.

Orange/grains

The Grains group includes any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or other grains. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits are examples of grain products.

- ▶ Whole grains, packed with fiber and other nutrients, are better than refined grains. The recommendation to make at least half your grains “whole” has not changed.
- ▶ This means choosing foods like whole-wheat breads and cereals, oatmeal, brown rice, and bulgur. These are preferred over processed grains, such as white breads and white rice.

Purple/proteins

This group includes all foods made from meat, poultry, seafood, beans and peas, eggs, processed soy products, nuts, and seeds. Beans and peas are also part of the Vegetable group.

- ▶ Select a variety of protein foods for optimal nutrition.
- ▶ Opt for leaner protein choices, such as fish, white meat chicken and turkey without skin, and lean red meat.
- ▶ Include vegetarian protein sources, such as beans, soy, and nuts, which provide fiber and offer a variety of other vitamins and minerals not found in animal products.

Blue/dairy

All fluid milk products and many foods made from milk are considered part of this calcium-rich food group.

- ▶ Choose fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- ▶ Calcium choices for people who do not eat dairy include calcium-fortified juices and soy or rice beverages.

In addition

Other key concepts of MyPlate include:

- ▶ The importance of balancing calories
- ▶ Avoiding oversized portions
- ▶ Drinking water instead of sugary drinks
- ▶ Choosing lower-sodium foods

For more information, go to ChooseMyPlate.gov.

Healthy Snacks for Kids and Grown-Ups

Snacking can and should be a part of any nutritious meal plan. Here's how to make it healthy.

The word “snack” usually conjures up images of cookies, chips and even candy. But snack food doesn't have to mean “junk food.” What's more, nutritious, well-planned snacks can be a vital part of your meal plan.

Why not think about snacks as nutritious, planned “mini-meals” and not just junk food? Most growing



children need more quality nutrients than they normally eat during a day's worth of meals. And unless you are eating three very well-balanced meals, snacks can give an extra daily nutrition boost to adults, too.

Simple snack suggestions

Start by talking to the whole family about the snack suggestions below. Pick your favorite ideas, type up your

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own list and pin it onto the fridge. Then stock up on your choices so they will be ready-made and at your fingertips.

Mixed food ideas

A good after-school or in-between meal snack should include fruits and/or vegetables, but also a little protein and whole grain to help stave off hunger until dinner:

- ▶ Whole-grain, low-sugar cereal and low-fat milk
- ▶ Low-fat string cheese and whole-grain crackers
- ▶ Whole-wheat English muffin with melted low-fat cheese
- ▶ Whole-grain waffle topped with fruited yogurt and fresh fruit
- ▶ Yogurt or cottage cheese topped with sliced fruit and cereal or nuts
- ▶ Large rice cake spread with natural peanut butter
- ▶ Whole-wheat toast topped with natural peanut butter and sliced banana
- ▶ Whole-grain crackers, hummus and raw veggies
- ▶ Low-fat cottage cheese with diced tomatoes, cucumbers and a dash of fresh pepper
- ▶ Fruit smoothie (blend together low-fat yogurt, frozen fruit, skim milk, 100 percent juice)
- ▶ Baked potato topped with chili beans or broccoli and low-fat cheese
- ▶ A bowl of bean or vegetable soup

Fruits and veggies

Many kids will surprise you and eat raw fruits and veggies, especially when they are hungry. After school or right before dinner is the best time to “sneak” them in.

The key is to make healthy snacks visible and appealing. Without saying a word, place a veggie tray near your kids when they are busy doing homework or playing before dinner. Then watch the food disappear. Don't forget to munch on them yourself while you are cooking!

- ▶ Use colorful veggies, such as cherry tomatoes, yellow and red peppers, sliced cucumber, carrot and celery sticks and sugar snap peas.
- ▶ Make a creamy vegetable dip. Mix your favorite dry salad dressing mix into plain Greek yogurt to make a great tasting low-fat dip.
- ▶ Leave apples, plums, nectarines or peaches in a bowl in the kitchen.
- ▶ Cut up cantaloupe or watermelon and leave in a clear container in the fridge.
- ▶ Put firm grapes and orange wedges out on a plate after dinner or at snack time.

Pure crunch

If you're really in the mood for something crunchy and salty, stick with foods that don't have hydrogenated fats and are free of food dyes.

- ▶ Trail mix. Combine nuts and seeds (such as almonds, walnuts, peanuts and sunflower seeds) with raisins, craisins and/or dried apricots, pretzel bits and/or oat cereal bits. Be creative!
- ▶ Pretzels.
- ▶ Baked or trans-fat-free tortilla chips.
- ▶ Low-fat microwave popcorn.
- ▶ Low-sugar granola bars.

Sweet treats

If your sweet tooth strikes, go for natural sugar from fruit. Otherwise, stick to foods that come in one-serving packages to prevent overindulgence. Try:

- ▶ Frozen fruit bars (no high-fructose corn syrup)
- ▶ Fudge bars (one bar has 60 to 90 calories and only one gram of fat)
- ▶ Low-fat pudding cup
- ▶ All-natural applesauce
- ▶ Ginger snaps
- ▶ Mini flavored rice cakes

Keep in mind that foods like chips and cookies are fine to snack on once in a while. But if you get into the habit of serving and eating nutritious snacks most of the time, you'll be helping yourself, and your kids, establish healthy patterns for a lifetime.



Antioxidants: The Superheroes of Food

Antioxidants may help protect against some chronic diseases and help protect cells from aging. Find out the best food sources and learn whether or not it's okay to supplement.

The nutrition world has been buzzing for the last several years about antioxidants. Antioxidants are natural substances found in foods. They contain the pigments that lend color to fruits, vegetables and other foods.

But why the superhero status? Experts believe antioxidants may help prevent disease by fighting substances called “free radicals.” Free radicals cause cell damage throughout the body. Antioxidants combine with, and thereby “neutralize,” free radicals. In this way, antioxidants may help slow or prevent damage to cells.

Antioxidants to the rescue

Free radicals are created in your body every day. They form during cell reactions involving oxygen, such as breathing. The problem occurs when free radicals are created in abnormally large amounts. This can happen when the body is exposed to things such as:

- ▶ radiation
- ▶ ultraviolet light
- ▶ cigarette smoke
- ▶ certain chemicals
- ▶ excess stress

Without adequate amounts of antioxidants to combat the free radicals, they travel throughout the body, damaging cells. Damage caused by free radicals is thought to cause or contribute to heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer's, age-related changes in vision and other signs of aging.

Food sources of antioxidants

Some of the more common antioxidants below can be found in these foods:

Vitamin A: Carrots, squash, broccoli, sweet potatoes, tomatoes, kale, collards, cantaloupe, peaches and apricots

Vitamin C: Citrus fruits like oranges and lime, apples, green peppers, broccoli, green leafy vegetables, strawberries and tomatoes

Vitamin E: Nuts and seeds, whole grains, green leafy vegetables, vegetable oil

Selenium: Fish and shellfish, red meat, grains, eggs, chicken and garlic

Flavonoids: Beans, red wine, purple grapes, pomegranate, cranberries, tea

Lycopene: Tomato and tomato products, pink grapefruit, watermelon

Lutein: Dark green veggies such as kale, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, spinach

To supplement or not?

Most Americans fall way short of the recommended daily servings of antioxidant-rich foods. About one in five Americans takes an antioxidant supplement. However, a review of recent studies published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that taking certain antioxidants as supplements:

- ▶ provided no health benefits
- ▶ might even increase the risk of death



Though there has been some controversy surrounding this and other studies, research consistently shows that those who eat antioxidant-rich foods reap health benefits.

Until further notice, it's best to get your antioxidants from foods, not supplements. In addition, though a supplement may contain one or more antioxidants, foods are thought to contain thousands of types. And it's not clear which of these substances or combination of substances are the most beneficial.

A balanced diet your best bet

In order to get the most out of your foods and fight off free radical damage, follow these recommendations:

- ▶ Eat a variety of fruits and vegetables, at least six or more servings a day

- ▶ Include whole grains such as whole wheat, barley, quinoa and oatmeal
- ▶ Include healthy fats such as avocado, nuts and seeds and olive oil
- ▶ Increase intake of beans and legumes
- ▶ Drink small amounts of pomegranate, grape and/or cranberry juice
- ▶ Strictly limit saturated, hydrogenated and trans fats
- ▶ Strictly limit excess sugar

Start adding antioxidant-rich foods to your diet today. It's not too much effort when you consider that taking this advice may help slow down the aging process and help safeguard your health.

