



Superfoods for Super Health

*Five nutritional
powerhouses that
pack lots of punch*

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You don't need a lot of food to get a lot of nutrition. You just need to be discerning about what foods you eat. Some foods are full of calories yet relatively void of nutrition, while others are low in calories but so packed with vitamins, minerals, and other healthful compounds that they deserve to be called *superfoods*.

While superfoods are the best whole foods out there, none of them are magic bullets. For optimal health, be sure to eat a varied diet, including superfoods whenever possible. What follows are descriptions of five of the most well-known and readily available such superstars, with details about why they are so good for you and suggestions for how to incorporate them into your regular diet.

Almonds

Two ounces of almonds provide more than 50 percent of your daily requirement of magnesium, a mineral important for heart and bone health, among other benefits. Eating almonds every day for at least a month has been shown to reduce cholesterol and lower other risk factors for heart disease. According to research done at the Mayo Clinic, one ounce of almonds (about 23 whole nuts) offers more calcium than any other nut as well as iron, vitamin E, and riboflavin—all good for maintaining health and energy.

Of course, nuts *are* high in fat, but the fat they contain is monounsaturated, the healthy kind of fat. Almonds are also rich in phosphorus, which helps build strong bones



and teeth. They contain significant amounts of riboflavin and L-carnitine, which support brain health. And according to the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda, almonds nourish the nervous system.

They may even help you lose weight and prevent diabetes. Data from the Nurses' Health Study showed that people who eat nuts frequently are thinner on average than those who almost never consume nuts. Almonds also slow the rise of insulin after meals, keeping blood sugar more stable.

Sprinkle this superfood in salads, grind them into pastry, or eat a handful raw. You can also buy almond butter (a good substitute for peanut butter) and almond

milk (which you can use in place of dairy milk in most recipes).

To make almond milk on your own, start with one cup of almonds soaked overnight in purified water and then drained and rinsed. (This soaking makes the almonds softer and more plump, and it also makes their nutrients more bioavailable.) Put the softened nuts in a blender with four cups of purified water and blend on high for 60 seconds. For the smoothest consistency, strain out the almond meal and fiber. Keep the almond milk refrigerated; it will last for three days.

Berries

Berries have many benefits, beginning with the fact that they have only a moderate effect on insulin levels compared to other fruits, so they're helpful for people with diabetes and blood sugar issues. Berries—including blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, boysenberries, cranberries, and strawberries—also have high amounts of phytochemicals, thought to protect against damaging carcinogens.

Which is the best berry of all for brain health? It's the



blueberry, known as the "brain berry" because studies show it enhances mental function. Could raspberries' antiviral and anticancer properties taste any sweeter? Raspberries also contain salicylic acid (so-called "natural aspirin" because it's chemically similar to drugstore aspirin), which helps fight pain and inflammation and cleanses the tissues of toxins. Blackberries are rich in vitamin C (a natural antioxidant) and vitamin K (which helps blood clot, aids calcium absorption, and protects against bone loss) and various minerals. Just one cup of blackberries contains more than 30 percent of the daily recommended amount of fiber, which promotes healthy digestion and aids in maintaining bowel regularity (which in turn decreases the risk for colon cancer).

Find ways to add berries—whether fresh or frozen—to a host of foods you already eat. Enjoy them in smoothies, in fruit salads, in cereals, as dessert, or by simply popping them in your mouth as a snack.

Cinnamon

Most people love the taste (and smell) of cinnamon. Its fragrance often conjures up thoughts of the holidays and special baked goods. An ancient spice obtained from the dried bark of several varieties of Asian trees, cinnamon is a highly versatile flavoring with properties that help relieve bloating and gas. Adding cinnamon, especially to sugary foods, helps normalize blood sugar by making insulin more efficient. The spice's most active ingredient is methylhydroxy chalcone polymer (MHCP), which speeds up the processing of sugar by 2,000 percent. Avoiding high



circulating levels of blood sugar and insulin may help ward off diabetes and obesity. Steady, lower insulin levels are a sign of slower aging and greater longevity.

To get more cinnamon in your diet, sprinkle it on fruits and cereal, blend it in smoothies, and incorporate it into puddings, muffins, brownies, breads, fruit sauces, purées, soups, and squash dishes. Don't forget that you can put a cinnamon stick in your water, tea, or other hot beverages, as well. (I put a cinnamon stick in my water glass or bottle. The tight curl of the stick will slowly open up. After about two days, I replace it with a fresh cinnamon stick.)

Walnuts

If you aren't already, you should be nuts about walnuts. Numerous studies published in scientific journals show walnuts have unique cancer-fighting qualities. For example, researchers at the University of California-Davis and other research centers have determined that two handfuls of walnuts each day could cut the risk of



breast cancer and tumor growth in half; walnuts shrink levels of the hormone IGF-1, known to play a key role in development of both prostate and breast cancer.

Research has also found that both walnuts and walnut oil reduce cholesterol and increase insulin sensitivity, making them valuable in the fight against heart disease and diabetes. Because of their rich omega-3 fat content, walnuts are often the subject of cancer-preventive studies. Yet as with any nut, don't eat too many; just 2.6 ounces of walnuts contain about 482 calories.


Add walnuts to oatmeal, salads, and vegetable stir-fry or sprinkle them on top of steamed green beans. You can even grind them up into walnut meal to use in place of flour. Or, of course, eat them by themselves as a healthy snack.

Chia Seeds

A super-nutritious food of the ancient Aztec and Mayan cultures, chia seeds offer a big nutritional punch in a small package. One ounce of the tiny black seeds—about three



tablespoons—contains 140 calories, 11 grams of fiber, 180 milligrams of calcium, four grams of hunger-squashing protein, and nine grams of healthy omega-3 alpha-linolenic acids and omega-6 essential fatty acids. With this much fiber, chia seeds provide more than a third of your daily fiber needs in a single serving, helping to keep your bowels regular. Eating these nutrient-rich gems of nature on a regular basis will also give you more energy.

Chia seeds—which have a very mild, nutty, pumpkin seed-like taste—expand in your stomach and can give you a feeling of fullness, helping you feel less hungry. (Try drinking a large glass of water mixed with one tablespoon of chia seeds about 20 minutes before a meal to prevent overeating.) After stirring the seeds in water or juice for about 20 minutes, the seeds transform from small crunchy seeds to slippery textural treats, sort of like tiny tapioca pearls. Add ground chia seeds to yogurt or hot cereal, sprinkle whole seeds on top of salads, or add whole seeds to your smoothies before blending. And be sure to try the easy chia seed pudding recipe included here. 

Basic Chia Pudding Recipe

Ingredients:

4 tablespoons whole chia seeds
1 ½ cups almond milk (or coconut, cashew, pistachio, hemp, soy, or rice milk)
2 tablespoons maple syrup
(or other liquid sweeteners like agave or honey)
¼ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Ground cinnamon to taste

Directions:

Combine ingredients thoroughly and refrigerate for at least four hours or preferably overnight. Pudding will still be somewhat fluid. If you prefer a firmer consistency, add more chia seeds and less milk. When ready to eat, top with fruit, nuts, or granola. You can also sprinkle additional cinnamon on top.

Serves up to three people, depending on whether you eat it as a snack, as a dessert, or as a meal (such as breakfast)

Superfood Parfait (Featuring All Five Superfoods)



Ingredients:

Basic chia pudding, made with almond milk
(see recipe above)
Berries (fresh or frozen)
Ground cinnamon
Walnut halves

Directions:

Mash some of the berries with a fork, and then spoon a layer of resulting berry purée into the bottom of a parfait glass or a glass mug. Then add a few tablespoons of basic chia seed pudding mixture on top of the berry purée. Top the pudding with a dash of cinnamon powder, some walnut halves, and the whole berries of your choice.