

## Back to basics

FOR GOOD HEALTH AND LONGEVITY

by Janet Bond Brill, Ph.D., R.D.

Nutritional shakes, energy bars and specially formulated dietary supplements all drain our pocketbooks, but do they really give us more energy, make us healthier and help us live longer? Unfortunately, most of the claims are grossly exaggerated or are just simply not true. A poor diet with supplements is still a poor diet!

What many people don't realize is that the secret to staying healthy and fit as we age is right in our own kitchens or at our local supermarkets. Of course, exercise is an important ingredient, but adding a few basic highly nutritious foods into our diets can also play a major role in keeping us healthy. Mother Nature provides certain foods containing a complex combination of antioxidants, phytochemicals or omega-3 fatty acids, which work in special ways to confer significant health benefits. Here are six power foods ranked highest on the healthy food scale. Try to incorporate some of these foods filled with all kinds of health-promoting nutrients into your diet on a regular basis.

### 1. BLUEBERRIES

Blueberries are chock full of anthocyanins, molecules of red, blue and purple pigments that give these lovely little pearls their gorgeous deep blue color. Anthocyanins are powerful antioxidants that work to combat the devastating free-radical damage thought to be partly responsible for heart disease, cancer and aging. Research has recently shown a diet rich in blueberries helped prevent age-related mental decline in rats. Scientists hope to translate these findings into preventing Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease in humans. A one-cup serving of blueberries contains a mere 80 calories and four grams of filling and healthful fiber. Remember that blueberries are just one kind of healthful antioxidant-rich food. Try to eat an array of foods that have this type of deep blue, purple, orange, red or green color. For it is the eye-appealing colorful foods that contain the greatest amounts of these powerful health-enhancing nutrients.



## 2. SALMON



Wild salmon from the deep blue sea (not farm-raised) contains loads of healthy fats called omega-3 fatty acids. These large, adult fish have eaten smaller fish all the way down the food chain to algae, which is what originally contained these healthy fats. Omega-3 fatty acids are polyunsaturated oils that cannot be made by the human body and therefore must be consumed in our diet. Omega-3's have anti-inflammatory properties thought to protect the heart and blood vessels from disease. New research has also suggested that omega-3 fatty acids may benefit brain cells. Scientists noticed that countries with the highest fish consumption had the lowest rates of depression. Apparently omega-3 can increase the amount of a critical neurotransmitter within the brain (serotonin), which is valuable for preventing depression. Don't like fish? Canola oil and flax seeds are great plant sources of this type of super healthy fat.

## 3. SPINACH

No wonder Popeye was in such great shape! Spinach is low in fat, high in fiber and simply loaded with healthful nutrients such as vitamin A, C, calcium, iron and folate. Another very important ingredient found in spinach is lutein, an antioxidant that protects the cells from the damaging (aging and disease-promoting) effects of dangerous free radicals. Recent studies have shown that low intakes of lutein could contribute to the development "age-related macular degeneration," an incurable eye disease that is the leading cause of blindness in older Americans. A simple way to eat more of this original health food is to replace lettuce with spinach in salads and sandwiches. Protect your health, your most precious asset, and more specifically your eyesight and...eat more spinach!

## 4. GARLIC

Garlic may be bad for your first date, but it is tops for preventing a host of health problems. The sulphur-containing component of garlic that gives it that pungent odor is called allyl sulfide and is precisely what gives garlic its high cancer-fighting properties. Allyl sulphides have also been shown to reduce cholesterol and make blood less sticky, thereby helping to prevent heart disease as well. It is best to release these compounds first before eating the garlic by mashing or grating it. Extensive cooking may destroy the potency of these beneficial substances, so don't cook it too long. Try roasted garlic as a spread instead of butter. It is far less calories, promotes good health and tastes delicious!



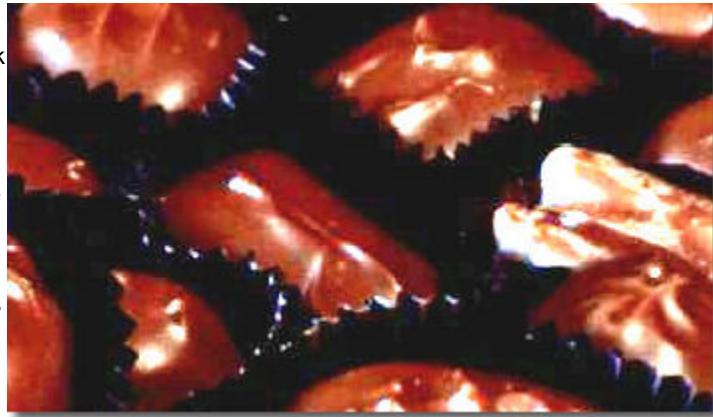


## 5. NUTS

Yes, they are high in fat (the good kind - monounsaturated), high in calories and some are kind of salty, but research has shown that they are great for reducing your risk of heart disease and also can help you lose weight! Used as a weight loss aid, they provide a very filling source of protein. Eaten in small amounts, nuts could easily be included in a balanced weight-loss eating plan. An excellent source of antioxidants and fiber, nuts help to lower the bad cholesterol and triglycerides plus raise the good cholesterol (HDL) and protect our cardiovascular system from disease. Pecans and walnuts can help our bodies fight off cancer because they contain ellagic acid, a potent anti-cancer phytochemical. Remember, nuts pack in about 150-200 calories per ounce (ouch), so don't go overboard!

## 6. DARK CHOCOLATE

Hallelujah! Now this is good news...dark (not milk) chocolate has been shown to contain significant amounts of flavonoids. Flavonoids are a group of phytochemicals that are rich in antioxidant activity. Flavonoids have the ability to reduce heart disease by making blood less sticky and by lowering the bad type of cholesterol (LDL). Dark chocolate also contains lots of polyphenols (another group of phytochemicals), which scientists have just determined can lower blood pressure. Now this is one medicine that won't need any help going down!



Remember, eating the whole food is what scientists have determined confers health benefits. Supplements of isolated components have not exhibited the same power in preventing serious chronic health ailments. Instead of trying to stay healthy by popping expensive supplements, focus your energy on incorporating these types of original health foods into your diet on a regular basis. Go to your kitchen and try to enjoy some of nature's bounty of colorful nutritional powerhouses every day, for eating these foods is the real secret to good health and longevity! oooo

Janet Brill, Ph.D., R.D. is a registered dietitian as well as an exercise physiologist. Dr. Janet is certified by ACSM and NSCA and is licensed to practice as a nutritionist in the State of Florida. She specializes in weight control, wellness and sports nutrition. Currently she is in private practice in Coral Springs and teaches classes in Sports Nutrition and Exercise Physiology at the University of Miami. Dr. Janet can be reached at 954-401-4279

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10100 W. Sample Rd., 3rd Floor, Coral Springs, FL 33065  
Phone: 954-255-9906 Fax: 954-255-7835  
email: [info@citysmartmagazine.com](mailto:info@citysmartmagazine.com)