

Fitnzz.com - What are Superfoods?



The Right Approach to Superfoods

A dedication to exercise and the maintenance of a nutritionally enriched diet have long been the mainstays of healthy living. But it is true to say that the last twenty years have seen a significant rise in the number of medical experts citing superfoods as a major contributor towards lower cholesterol, a reduced risk of heart disease and improved mental agility. The post-millennium explosion of mail order health supplements, such as acai berry and resveratrol tablets, have served to increase public confidence in the powers of antioxidants and phytonutrients.

Superfoods, however, are more readily available and can be easily integrated into daily lifestyles without too much effort.

Superfoods first hit the headlines in 1991, following a “60 Minutes” show that highlighted the hypothesis of Doctor Serge Renaud, a scientist from the Bordeaux University in France. Renaud claimed to have found essential links between the voracious French appetite for red wine, and the lower levels of cardiac disease found throughout France in comparison to other countries.

Although the French nation consume high levels of fat from animal sources as part of their daily diet, Renaud believed that the powerful antioxidants found in grape skins had a significantly positive impact on the health of those who consumed ‘moderate’ levels of red wine. The hypothesis was labelled as “The French Paradox” by Renaud, and ongoing studies have revealed an extensive list of superfoods that contain similar health benefits to those found in grapes.

Much has been made about this discovery including an emphasis on red superfoods, but green superfoods, such as wheat grass and green-leaf vegetables, are amongst the healthiest of all. Raw vegetables have high chlorophyll content, are packed with easily digestible proteins and include a wider range of essential minerals and vitamins. These easy-to-source superfoods transfuse blood effectively, serve as a stimulant to the brain and benefit your immune system. Spinach, broccoli and watercress are all essential green vegetables, and the cultivation of different algae to produce superfoods with highly concentrated levels of phytonutrients has become more popular in modern times.

Fish has been recognised as one of our leading superfoods for many years and as well as lowering the potential for heart-related illnesses; it also reduces the risk of arthritis and Alzheimer’s disease. Wild herring, salmon and sardines are rich in essential Omega-3 oils and scientific

evidence shows fish to be one of several superfoods that can improve symptoms of depression. Walnuts and fortified eggs are also high in Omega-3 content.

Leading doctors and nutritionists recognise blueberries as one of the most important superfoods of all. As well as being an essential source of vitamin C and potassium, blueberries contain high levels of antioxidants and phytoflavonoids. Fruit superfoods combat inflammation, and are a significant contributor to most major chronic diseases, in addition, blueberries dramatically lower the risk of heart disease and cancer. It is important to note that the darker a blueberry is, the more antioxidants it is likely to contain, and this is true of most fruits and vegetables that are classified as superfoods.

Soy, fibres, tea and calcium-enriched superfoods such as dairy products all have significant phytonutrient content that promotes improved physical well-being and mental health, but a final word should be saved for those with a weakness for food items that have been traditionally recognised as being unhealthy in the past. New research has shown dark chocolate (with a cocoa content of 60% or more) to be packed with beneficial antioxidants, thus making it one of the most enjoyable and popular superfoods of all.

Go Nuts and Get Fruity

Seeds, pulses and nuts contain fibre and protein. They are also low in saturated fats. When you add to the fact that they are completely free from Cholesterol, then you can see the benefits of including them in your diet.

Pulses include peas, beans, and lentils. They are inexpensive and easy to cook giving you a valuable source of protein which is believed by many leading experts to actually reduce cholesterol levels in the blood.

They are also beneficial to diabetics because the sugars in them are converted into glucose in the blood stream at a slower rate. This means that it will not cause spikes in the blood glucose levels.

One thing to remember though is that although seeds and nuts and pulses are low in cholesterol they are high in calories. So if you're on a diet of some kind you will have to limit your intake.

Fruits are naturally sweet and colourful. Easy to eat and packed with healthy nutrients. Everyone can benefit by including at least some fruit in their diet. Research has shown that people who readily consume one or two portions of fruit a day are less likely to suffer from many well known diseases.

Fruit is rich in antioxidants and vitamin C. Antioxidants are your friends, they roam around the bloodstream and destroy less than friendly substances called free radicals. Free radicals are thought to be a cause of some cancers.

There are tons of ways to increase your [fruit intake](#). Green salad comes to life if you add some orange segments or sliced peaches. Breakfast can be fun as well. Just add your favourite berries and nuts to your regular cereal.

Fruits that many years ago would have been unavailable are now plentiful in modern supermarkets and stores. It is well worth experimenting with fruits like mangoes, figs and lychees.

Do not overlook dried fruit either- they may be thought of as content for cakes or pies but dried fruit retains all the goodness in its dehydrated form as normal fruit. Dried fruit is great again in cereal if you wish to be a little creative and is even easier to carry around with you in case you feel like snacking.

If anti-oxidants are the 'good guys' that support your immune system and work to combat those harmful elements within your body, then 'free radicals' are the terror wielding extremists that wreak havoc and threaten your well-being. These facts have been widely circulated but often people don't understand the importance of how a healthy and balanced diet works.

Goji Berries

Grown on vines, these red berries have a very distinctive flavour- and reportedly, contain 500 times more Vitamin C than other fruit per ounce. They do have a cluster of Vitamins such as: A, B1, B2, B6 and E and include 18 amino acids and 21 trace minerals.

Raw Cacao

Raw cacao beans have the most concentrated source of antioxidants and boast of high quantities of magnesium which is often deficient in even those who follow a healthy diet. Raw cacao beans also provide iron.

Maca

Maca powder which comes from the maca root in Peru has been cultivated for thousands of years and has long been considered a superfood – consumed initially by Inca warriors in a bid to increase their endurance and strength, supplements are readily available.

Acai

Acai berries formed part of the staple diet for tribes within the Amazon. Acai berries are considered to have powerful antioxidant qualities and contain high levels of anthocyanins.

Coconuts

Coconuts contain high qualities of electrolytes (young coconuts are best for this) and these electrolytes are ionized salts found in your cells and they work to transport energy throughout the body. As opposed to drinking commercial sports drinks- which are incredibly high in sugars, instead choose coconut water as its molecular structure is identical to your blood plasma, so your body recognises it immediately and it is put to good use.

Coconut Oil

Coconut Oil can actually speed up your metabolic rate helping you to burn more calories as opposed to other saturated fats which become stored in the cells of your body. The fatty acids in coconut oil are converted into energy immediately as they are sent directly to your liver.

So go nuts and [get fruity](#).

What is whole grain and is it really good for you?

Whole grain means the complete product is being used. Many foods today use processed grain in their production. This is often called refined.

Grain is made up of four different parts. When the grain is processed the three outer parts are removed, leaving behind a product that lacks protein, vitamins, and fibre. An example would be white flour. Nearly all cakes and biscuits will be made this way.

It has been proven that people whose diet includes mostly starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes and white rice tend to suffer from higher rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

So it makes sense to include whole grain in your diet on regular basis. This can be obtained by including wholemeal bread, brown rice, and wholemeal pasta in your meal plans.

Whole grain helps reduce cardiovascular disease because it is low in saturated fats.

Some popular healthy grains:

Brown Rice.

Brown rice will have both the germ and bran complete. It is a good source of protein, carbohydrates and fibre.

Wild Rice

Has twice the protein of white rice and can be used in the same way. Wild Rice is actually a type of grass.

Oats

Oats are king in the protein stakes, containing more than nearly all the other grains. Very high soluble fibre works to remove cholesterol within the body. Sometimes you will see the words 'rolled oats'. These are just whole oats that have been crushed.

Wheat

Whole grain wheat is jam packed with B vitamins. It is a very versatile grain.

Maize

Loaded with starch and can be eaten fresh. Everyone will recognise fresh maize as sweet corn. When ground down it becomes polenta or cornmeal.

Barley

Used in beer making and malt whiskey. Barley is always soaked before cooking. Avoid pearl barley this has the husk and bran removed.

Quinoa

Often hailed as a super food because it contains masses of protein and can be substituted for almost all other grains.

This list will hopefully highlight some of the benefits of including wholemeal products in your regular diet. Reduced heart disease should be reason enough.

Aside from health reasons, food just tastes better when we eat it the way nature intended.

There is no doubt that the term 'superfoods' have been heavily marketed over recent years and for commercial reasons but there is no legal standing on this. In fact, the marketing of products labelled 'superfoods' have actually been prohibited unless accompanied by in-depth medical research. The term however does still drive people towards buying certain foods instead of looking at their own dietary needs.

Bee Superfoods

Bee superfoods were discovered accidentally simply following an investigation into those Russian Beekeepers who often lived to 100+ years and ate raw honey every day. It was deemed that this regular intake of honey helped the longevity of those who consumed it. Honey has wide-ranging properties, for example, honey can help to sooth a sore throat especially when added to fresh ginger. It has been used effectively on wounds and even works to ease gastrointestinal problems. As a superfood it can increase the good bacteria within your colon and helps to fight free radicals gained by exposure to toxins such as cigarette smoke.

Royal Jelly

Royal jelly contains masses of nutrients included pantothenic acid (Vitamin B5) which is reported to help combat stress, insomnia and is excellent for hair treatments. It is actually a milk-like emission obtained from the worker bees head glands.

Bee Pollen

Bee Pollen has up to 7 times more protein than beef and is the most complete natural food source. It helps to fight allergies and provides

additional energy for athletes or those recuperating after illness.

Propolis

Propolis is used within the hive to coat the walls as a protection against bacteria. It has powerful antibiotic properties and can help to combat infections and strengthen your immune system.

Seaweed Superfoods

Seaweeds go onto the superfood list due to the fact that the chemical composition within is very close to human plasma and can help to regular and purify your blood as a result. Seaweed can also help to protect you from elemental toxins such as pollution or heavy metals and helps to convert them for elimination.

If you don't want to trawl the beach looking for newly washed up seaweed, you will be reassured to know that there are many supplements available also. Seaweed has become renowned for helping with weight loss and because of the high iodine content; it can help to stimulate the thyroid gland so that food is used for energy before being turned into fatty deposits.

Kelp

Kelp is available in a powder or a capsule to aid the thyroid gland. It can also be used to create a seaweed bath too.

Dulse

Dulse is a red seaweed and can be used raw or as a seasoning.

Kombu

Kombu has been popular in Japan for centuries as a flavour enhancer because it is so rich in minerals. It can also be used to ease the effect of gastric wind following from eating beans.

Herbs as Superfoods

Because they offer so much in the way of nutrients, herbs really should be included on the superfood list as they can help support the immune system and increase nourishment to your body if there are any deficiencies.

Aloe Vera

Aloe Vera has become highly sought after in recent years (again due to a clever marketing surge) but it should be deemed a superfood because it is an all-round herb that can help to combat a variety of health conditions and problems.

Aloe Vera is a succulent that grows wild and thrives in tropical or sub-tropical areas. Research verified that it has 75 healing compounds made up of amino acids, minerals, enzymes, natural steroids and antibiotic agents. It has so many qualities – used for bruises, burns, cuts, acne and eczema externally but it also helps to calm the digestive system and ease heartburn, ulcers and indigestion.

Echinacea

Echinacea has become one of the most popular and well-known herbs for helping to boost a flagging immune system and as a pick-me-up for warding off colds or flu bugs. It helps to stimulate the lymph flow too, carrying harmful toxins out of the body

Nettle

Nettles – or stinging nettles, are effective for helping to remove excess weight as part of any diet but a good cup of nettle tea first thing in the morning can also help to stimulate the bowel and work to eliminate wastage. Nettles also help the thyroid gland and can increase metabolism.

Ginseng

Ginseng is a popular tonic to increase energy and has been used for centuries in Asia. It helps to combat stress and fatigue and can even help with fighting off infections.

Summary

The whole superfood craze began initially with the heavy marketing campaign promoting the humble blueberry and although nutritionists tend to avoid the term superfoods, the trend still continues because marketing hype reached a crescendo. With the successful promotion of blueberries, the term superfood now includes a variety of other foods including acai berries, seaweed and pomegranates. As the superfood list grows ever longer so does the claims for memory-enhancing and health boosting merits.

No-one disputes the benefits of eating a comprehensive diet and including nuts, berries, fruits etc but currently the vastly escalated reputation of the superfoods are now under attack due to those querying the targeted marketing approach and sometimes, with little scientific research to support the claims.

It is wise to consider that eating any fruit for example would provide ample essential vitamins and minerals and therefore, these expensive or exotic foods are not required. Heavy, intensive marketing works well however, and even those with limited shopping budgets reach for the expensive carton of fruit ignoring cheaper and essentially very healthy local fruit and vegetables on the shelves.

The old adage 'a little of what you fancy will do you good' seems to hold true in this case as overloading your body- even with 'healthy' food, is not necessarily a healthy thing to do. If those nutrients cannot be used up or stored, they need to be excreted from the body otherwise they could cause damage on a cellular level.

The best practice really is to eat a balanced diet and not be taken in by marketing hype. If you fancy some more exotic fruits, then why not indulge? But always think in terms of moderation and reach for apples,

oranges and bananas too as although they may not seem as exotic by comparison, importantly, they contain masses of necessary nutrients.

A Mediterranean diet for example is as close to a perfect diet as you might get and there has been much research into it.

So if we look at Superfoods in general, it's wise to take a wide-angled approach to marketing campaigns and to look at the diet as a whole rather than targeting any one superfood as a miracle cure-all. In a way, a holistic and rational approach must surely make sense? A well-balanced diet containing lots of different fruits and vegetables and incorporating whole grains and nuts into your daily diet must provide a vast cocktail of nutritional must-haves, which will enable you to have all of your vitamin and minerals on a daily basis.

To know more about the food that you eat is important so that you can match your body's needs on an individual perspective. Absorb all of the information about various food types of course but don't fall for marketing hype which may not be based on scientific fact. Many foods are superfoods because they are nutritious and provide different vital elements, and you can increase your chances of ensuring that you consume the right nutritional content by understanding the foods that you eat more. This way, you are much more likely to remain fit and healthy.

If you fancy the more exotic or expensive superfoods, then indulge and enjoy. If it's [fresh and natural](#), it may well provide you with all of the wondrous elements that the marketers claim but don't omit to have plenty of other everyday superfoods, so that you dictate just what goes into your diet and not have the marketing world dictating to you.

Disclaimer: The information contained within this report is meant as a guide only and is not there to advise on nutritional content or direct consumers to any particular food types or sources.