

The TOP 10



SUPER FOODS_{of 2009}

Don't let unfamiliarity deter you. Introducing ten modern-day powerhouses for the food allergic.

Exciting foods are appearing in local supermarkets. New to many Americans, most of these slightly exotic foods were actually standard fare for the ancients, consumed for centuries in cultures around the

world. Today, they are modern-day super-performers. Naturally gluten free and generally well tolerated by people on special diets, they all contain high levels of beneficial antioxidants and are exceptionally nutritious.

Much of what Americans consume today is over-processed, stripped of essential nutrients. It often contains harmful additives, preservatives and pesticides. This is cause for concern for everyone but particularly troublesome for those of us on special diets. Facing limited choices, we are at higher risk than the general population for nutritional deficiency.

It's time for a change. Let the amazing health benefits of these power-packed foods entice you to expand your menu. Upping your nutrient count can make a difference in your energy level and mood. It can also increase your resilience to physical and emotional stressors, improve your immune function and protect you from heart disease. Incorporate one or more of these super foods (listed in alphabetical order) into your diet every week for renewed vitality, healthier living and an adventure in good taste.

Super Foods

Today

The Top 10 Super Foods of 2009 include the most nutrient-dense powerhouses available today for people with special dietary needs. While many of these foods may be unfamiliar to you, don't let that stop you from adding them to your diet. They are "re-discovered" foods. Relative newcomers to the American market, they have a proven track record of providing essential nourishment to human beings around the world.

Yesterday

Four years ago, we selected our Top 10 Super Foods of 2005 (beets, Brazil nuts, broccoli, cabbage, flax seeds, kale, lentils, plain yogurt, pomegranates and quinoa) because they were gluten free, highly nutritious, readily available, relatively inexpensive and easy to prepare. These ten remain an important part of a healthy, balanced diet. Read *The Top Ten Super Foods of 2005* at LivingWithout.com. Click on Past Articles.

1. Acai Berries

Grown in the Amazon rainforest on acai palm trees, the acai (pronounced ah-sigh-ee) berry contains up to 30 times more anthocyanins (the blue antioxidants found in blueberries and grapes) than red wine. It offers beneficial omega 3 fatty acids, amino acids, fiber, iron and a list of vitamins and minerals. This berry's ORAC value, the measurement of a food's antioxidant power, is higher than any other edible berry in the world! An excellent source of dietary fiber, the acai berry also provides plant sterols, including beta-sitosterol used to treat high cholesterol and prostate problems. The acai berry looks like a purple grape and tastes a bit like grape juice. It's available as refrigerated bottled juice and a powder supplement at natural food stores, some supermarkets or online. A highly nutritious food that is beneficial for overall health, I specifically recommend consumption of the acai berry in juice or powder form to my patients with eye conditions (sties and other eye irritations) with excellent results.



2. Dark Chocolate

Dark chocolate is a complex food with over 300 helpful compounds and chemicals, including epicatechin, one of the highly beneficial molecules found in green tea. Chocolate offers many of the same health benefits as dark, leafy vegetables, including almost eight times more antioxidants than strawberries. Certain types of chocolate have been found to lower blood pressure and reduce LDL cholesterol (the bad cholesterol) by up to 10 percent. Besides the fact that it tastes good, one of the reasons people love chocolate is because it stimulates endorphin production and contains tryptophan, which can promote the release of serotonin. Endorphin and serotonin are the primary feel-good chemicals in the brain. Choose dark chocolate that's at least 70 percent cocoa. (There's no measurable health benefit to consuming white or milk chocolate.) The

downside to this super food? Chocolate contains some caffeine, as well as theobromine, a mild stimulant. It can be a trigger for migraines in sensitive people. It can also be high in fat and calories, so read the label and partake sparingly. A little goes a long way.

3. Dulse

Dulse, a dark red, edible seaweed that grows along the northern shorelines of the Atlantic Ocean, has been harvested for food for thousands of years. It was also used to treat scurvy and constipation. High in iodine, dulse is used as an herbal tonic for hypothyroidism and to soothe fibrocystic tender breasts. Dulse contains calcium, potassium, magnesium, iron, manganese, copper, chromium and zinc, as well as vitamins A, B-complex, C and E. Available as flakes in the health food section of your supermarket or natural food store, dulse has a salty, earthy flavor. It can be eaten plain or sprinkled on salads, soups, popcorn or baked potatoes. If you have a thyroid condition, consult your doctor before consuming dulse. It may alter your need for thyroid medication.

4. Figs

Figs have a long history in the cultures of countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. Rich in vitamins A and B-complex and loaded with antioxidants, calcium, iron, phosphorus, manganese, sodium and potassium, figs are also one of nature's best sources of fiber, including high levels of mucin and pectin, two soluble fibers. The fig is a laxative and diuretic that is easily digested and excellent for the liver. Dark figs contain twice the carotene, a powerful antioxidant, as the lighter varieties and usually have a more intense flavor. I often prescribe figs (three daily, taken at bedtime) for my patients with stubborn constipation. It's a tasty treatment that works. Considered

one of nature's candies, figs are delicious eaten plain and make a nutritious sweet snack.

5. Goji Berries

Goji berries have been used in traditional medicine in China, Korea, Japan and Tibet for centuries to treat inflammatory diseases and to enhance eyesight, the immune system, sperm production and liver function. Also known as wolf berries, goji berries are rich in amino acids, many vitamins and minerals, as well as essential fatty acids. They contain antioxidants and phytosterols, which can lower cholesterol and are good for the prostate. Available in dried form, they can be eaten whole like raisins or they can be easily reconstituted by soaking in hot water. They're good in cereal and sprinkled over yogurt. Goji berries are also available in powder form and can be found in juices and energy bars. A word of caution: Goji plants belong to the nightshade family (Solanaceae), which includes tomatoes, white potatoes, eggplant and peppers (not black pepper). Most people enjoy these healthy foods without negative consequences but those who are nightshade sensitive may find that goji berries exacerbate joint pain.

6. Muscadine Grapes

The muscadine grape, native to the southern United States, contains more

antioxidants than red wine grapes, pomegranates, cranberries or blueberries. Its seeds offer seven times more anti-cancer polyphenol and resveratrol than any other type of grape seed, helping protect the body against oxidative stress and free radical damage. The beneficial substances in muscadines promote healthy vision, joints and the circulatory system while supporting the cardiovascular system. These grapes are also high in ellagic acid, another cancer-fighting substance. Available seasonally in many supermarkets, muscadines have a juicy, earthy flavor. They are also found in juice, wines and jellies and can be taken as a supplement.

7. Nutritional Yeast

Yellow and flaky with a pleasant salty, cheese-like flavor, nutritional yeast is a complete protein with 18 amino acids, along with 15 different minerals. Grown on mineral-enriched molasses, nutritional yeast is one of nature's best sources of vitamin B-complex, important for improving mood and energy, balancing hormones and eliminating brain fog. (It is one of the only vegan sources of vitamin B12.) The earliest recorded use of nutritional yeast is 1550 BC in Egypt. Available in natural food stores or in the supplement section of many supermarkets, nutritional yeast is delicious sprinkled on hot popcorn or over gluten-free garlic bread. Brewer's



Shopping Guide

Many of these foods are available at supermarkets. Others can be found at natural food stores or online. For more information, try these websites.

Dark Chocolate
chocolatebar.com
edwardandsons.com

Dulse
edenfoods.com

Nutritional Yeast
bobsredmill.com
redstaryeast.com

Rice Bran
ener-g.com
bobsredmill.com

Salba Seed
salba.com

Teff
bobsredmill.com

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yeast, a by-product of beer production, offers similar nutrients but has a bitter hops flavor and often contains gluten. Note: Nutritional yeast is generally well tolerated but may not be suitable for those on a yeast-free diet.

8. Rice Bran

High in protein, fiber and antioxidants, rice bran (the bran removed from brown rice) is one of nature's most hypoallergenic foods. It contains balanced protein with all essential amino acids, is rich in natural vitamin E compounds, and is the highest natural source of tocopherols and tocotrienols, a deficiency of which can cause anemia, irritability and edema. High in B-complex vitamins, as well as potassium, magnesium, manganese and other trace minerals, rice bran is also packed with polyphenols, phytosterols and sterolins, substances that work to lower cholesterol. In addition, it contains carotenoids, including lutein and zeaxanthin, which are beneficial phytochemicals. Research has shown these molecules help our cardiovascular and immune systems. Rice bran is the only natural source of gamma-oryzanol, a substance that stimulates the release of endorphins, activating pleasure centers in the brain. In addition, rice bran has the ability to chelate heavy metals and other environmental toxins, helping remove them from the body. Available in natural food stores and most supermarkets, rice bran adds a mild nutty flavor when used in baking or when sprinkled on cereal, yogurt and casseroles.

9. Salba Seeds

Salba is a light-colored version of chia (yes, the seeds sprouted for chia pets). Harvested from a plant native to South America, these seeds were consumed in pre-Columbian times by the Aztecs and Mayans. Salba truly is a super food, offering abundant nutrients. It is very rich in omega 3 fatty acids, dietary fiber, antioxidants, magnesium, folate, calcium and iron, as well as vitamins A

and C. In addition, the protein in salba seeds contains all essential amino acids. Available as a whole grain or in a ground powder at natural food stores and online, salba is now also part of some snack products. Unlike flax seed, it is digestible in whole seed form. Salba becomes gelatinous when hydrated, absorbing 8 to 12 times its weight in water, which means it is slowly digested, reducing spikes in blood sugar levels. It has a mild, pleasant taste and whole salba seeds add crunch when sprinkled in smoothies, cereal, yogurt or casseroles.

10. Teff

Teff is the smallest grain in the world. Grown for centuries primarily as a cereal crop in its native Ethiopia, teff is often ground into flour, fermented for several days and made into injera, a sourdough-type of flat bread served in Ethiopian homes and restaurants. (Caution: Wheat flour is often added to injera in Ethiopian restaurants.) Teff is very high in protein, carbohydrates and fiber, as well as calcium, phosphorous, iron, copper and thiamin. It has an excellent amino acid composition, with lysine levels higher than wheat or barley. (Lysine is an amino acid that helps keep the immune system strong. It's used as treatment to prevent herpes outbreaks). Available at natural food stores and online, teff flour adds extra nutrients to gluten-free flour blends. (See *Living Without's* recipe for gluten-free High-Fiber Flour Blend on page 62.) Its mild, nutty flavor makes it a good thickener in soups, stews, gravies and puddings.

Whole grain teff is a tasty dish. To prepare, place 2 cups water, ½ cup whole grain teff and ¼ teaspoon sea salt in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer covered for 15 to 20 minutes or until water is absorbed. Remove from heat and let stand covered for 5 minutes. **LW**

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