



superfoods

20 of the best foods for super health



World Cancer
Research Fund

Before you begin

How much do you already know about healthy eating?

Put your knowledge to the test before you begin reading.

Tick what you believe to be the correct answer for each question and turn to the back to see how well you did. But no cheating!

1 How many portions of vegetables and fruits should we be eating each day for better health?

- a) 1 if you can
- b) 5 or more
- c) about 3

2 Which of these contain the most vitamin C per 100g?

- a) kiwi fruit
- b) oranges
- c) red peppers

3 What's the best way to cook most vegetables?

- a) boil them until soft
- b) steam them
- c) roast them in oil

4 We should try to avoid all fats and oils in our diet.

- a) true
- b) false

5 We should always try to enjoy a balanced diet, which includes mostly...

- a) animal foods: red meat, white meat, dairy products
- b) plant foods: vegetables, fruits, cereals, grains, pulses
- c) fats and sugars: found in cakes and biscuits

6 Healthy eating should be combined with what for better health?

- a) physical activity
- b) maintaining a healthy body weight
- c) not smoking
- d) all of the above

7 Taking dietary supplements is just as good as eating a healthy, balanced diet.

- a) true
- b) false

8 Diet and lifestyle can affect our risk of developing cancer.

- a) true
- b) false

Cancer is *not* inevitable...

● Eating more vegetables and fruits is the second most effective way to reduce your risk of cancer, after not smoking.¹

● Despite this, 53% of UK people we asked were not aware that their diet could influence their risk of cancer.²

¹Department of Health. 2000. The NHS Plan.

²Based on findings from WCRF UK's Cancer & Obesity study carried out by TNSOFRES Healthcare (2003).

The WCRF UK Diet and Health Guidelines for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Choose a diet rich in a variety of plant-based foods
- 2 Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits
- 3 Maintain a healthy weight and be physically active
- 4 Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all
- 5 Select foods low in fat and salt
- 6 Prepare and store food safely

And, always remember... Do not smoke or use tobacco in any form.

The power of food

Discover the hidden benefits

Food is a basic necessity – it's the fuel that keeps us going every day. But it also offers us many other benefits. Certain types of food, such as oily fish, vegetables, fruits and other plant foods, stand out in the nutritional crowd because they have special properties that make them unique in terms of how beneficial they can be to our health.

And it is because of their health-enhancing qualities that we sometimes refer to these as 'superfoods'. The nutrients contained within these foods can assist with many of the body's natural functions – such as digestion, boosting the immune system, strengthening bones and even helping to protect against cancer.

'Anti' whats?

We've all heard the word 'antioxidant'. But what exactly are dietary antioxidants, and what do they do? In short, 'antioxidant' is the term used to describe the group of vitamins, minerals and certain phytochemicals, found in foods, that help to protect the body from the damaging effects of oxygen free radicals. These are unstable molecules that are created naturally by the body and that can also be produced by toxins (like tobacco), pollution and radiation from sunlight and radioactive materials. These toxins can be 'carcinogenic' – meaning they can alter or damage cells in the body which can lead to the development of cancer. Antioxidants are able to 'mop-up' free radicals or prevent them from forming, and it is thought that they could thereby help to prevent cell damage.

Natural protection

Some scientists believe that it is the natural reactions of different nutrients, gained through eating a healthy diet, that can be most beneficial to a person's health. This is why it's best to avoid taking supplements – unless your doctor has advised you otherwise – as some studies of higher dose supplements have shown harmful effects. By eating a balanced diet that includes a variety of plant foods, we stand a much better chance of getting all the nutrients we need for optimum health.

Super shopping essentials

You're probably already asking yourself 'which foods are the **most** beneficial to my health?'. Although individual foods cannot yet be linked to specific illnesses, we do know that certain foods contain higher than average amounts of health-boosting nutrients.

Here, dietitian Lyndel Costain, identifies 20 of the best superfoods available. For better health, try to make these delicious choices a regular feature in your weekly shopping and aim to enjoy a wide variety every day (see pages 9 and 10 for recipe ideas).

The foods on the following pages are not a definitive list and are not ranked in any particular order. Each food has been chosen because it is believed to help boost the body's immune system, thereby keeping it strong and resistant to serious illnesses such as cancer and heart disease.

Watch your waist

Including more of these superfoods in your diet – in the place of red meats, fatty foods and sugary foods – means you'll also stand a much better chance of reaching, and maintaining, a healthy body weight. This is another important aspect of cancer prevention as scientists have recently discovered that being overweight or obese can increase our risk.

Peppers are an excellent source of vitamin C – just half a red pepper provides you with all the vitamin C you need in one day. They're also useful sources of flavonoids and beta-carotene – both of which might help to oppose the free radical damage that can eventually lead to cancer.



Red and orange peppers

One of the few fruits that are green when ripe, the tangy yet sweet kiwi fruit are a great source of vitamin C – even better than an orange when compared in weight. Kiwi fruit also contain vitamin K, potassium and magnesium. Their green colour is due to the phytochemical chlorophyll.



Kiwi fruit

Brazil nuts

These are rich in the mineral selenium, which has antioxidant effects that may help protect against cancer. Just a few of these little gems should be enough to meet your daily selenium needs, which is important because most of us in the UK have low intakes. Some studies link low intake with a higher risk of cancer and heart disease. Selenium can also help to keep the immune system strong. But beware of taking selenium supplements, as high doses can be toxic.





The rosy red colour of tomatoes is due to the mighty antioxidant lycopene. Some research has linked eating plenty of tomatoes – especially cooked, canned, pastes and sauces – with a reduced risk of heart disease and cancer, (in particular, prostate cancer, although this is not yet conclusive). Tomatoes are a source of antioxidant vitamins C and E, flavonoids and also potassium, which may help to regulate blood pressure.

Tomatoes

This cruciferous vegetable is notable for its sulphoraphane content, a phytochemical shown to activate enzymes which may destroy cancer-causing chemicals. It's also good for folic acid, vitamin C and other antioxidants. Enjoy raw as crudités or briefly steam or stir-fry. You can eat the tender stems too.

Broccoli



Onions contain allium compounds that have been linked to a reduced risk of some cancers. They are rich in a phytochemical called quercetin (especially red onions) which is a strong antioxidant. They may also help to improve circulation and to regulate blood pressure.

Onions



Sweet potatoes

These make a delicious and nutrient-packed change to ordinary potatoes. They contain more of the carotenoid antioxidants alpha and beta-carotene – which make their flesh orange – as well as vitamin E.



The cooking process helps the body absorb more carotenoids. Enjoy them boiled, mashed, in casseroles or puréed in soups.

Carrots

These root vegetables are one of the best sources of the antioxidant beta-carotene.

The body can also convert beta-carotene to vitamin A, which is needed for healthy skin, to strengthen the immune system and for night vision – so carrots do actually help you to see in the dark after all!



Mangoes

Exotic mangoes are bursting with antioxidants thanks to their high vitamin C content. They also contain some vitamin E and carotenoids – it's that orange flesh again! Enjoy them in fruit salads, smoothies, sorbets, juices, or add them to salsa (great with salmon: see page 9 for recipe).



Succulent and sweet, strawberries are definitely special foods. They pack a powerful antioxidant punch thanks to their vitamin C and flavonoid content. But their secret weapon could be a phytochemical called ellagic acid, which some studies have shown can help inhibit the growth of cancerous cells.



Strawberries

Watercress

Once a natural health remedy, watercress is brimming with beneficial B vitamins and minerals such as iron and calcium. It's a good source of the antioxidant vitamin C, flavonoids, beta-carotene and glucosinolates which are believed to have a range of possible anti-cancer effects. It also contains some vitamin E.



Sunflower seeds

All seeds are nutritional powerhouses, but sunflower seeds are richest in the powerful antioxidant vitamin E. Mix them with pumpkin seeds for a healthy blend of beneficial omega-6 and omega-3 fats. Sprinkle on cereal, salads, rice dishes, or enjoy just as a snack.



Salmon

Like all oily fish, salmon can be a good source of omega-3 fats. Best known for their beneficial effects on the heart, these fats might also help prevent cancer by enhancing the immune system. Salmon is a good source of selenium too. Aim to enjoy a portion or two of oily fish each week. Herring, mackerel, trout, sardines and pilchards are also good choices.



Love them or hate them, they're definitely good for you. The distinctive taste and smell of sprouts is, in fact, caused by a phytochemical called sinigrin. A serving of about nine sprouts provides plenty of the antioxidant vitamin C and also good levels of folic acid.



Brussel sprouts

Virgin olive oil



Part of the health-giving Mediterranean diet, virgin olive oil – particularly extra virgin – contains phenolic antioxidants, which give them their greeny-gold tinge. Antioxidant vitamin E and monounsaturated fats – that do not raise blood cholesterol – are other benefits. Like all oils, it's high in calories, so use sparingly when watching your weight.

Cabbage belongs to the same brassica family as sprouts, broccoli, and watercress, so it is bursting with the same type of goodness. It also provides good levels of vitamin C and folic acid. Some studies link eating lots of brassicas with a reduced risk of cancer, especially cancer of the digestive tract. Enjoy cabbage in salads, or if cooking, steam or braise lightly to conserve nutrients.

Cabbage



A good source of bowel-regulating fibre, phytochemicals, energy-releasing B vitamins and vital minerals. Unrefined 'wholefoods' such as brown rice and wholegrain bread and cereals are believed to help reduce our risk of bowel cancer too. Opt for wholemeal bread over white where possible.



Wholegrain bread

One of the oldest cultivated plants, and a long-standing natural medicine, studies suggest that garlic might also help to reduce our cancer risk. Its pungent, active 'ingredients' are phytochemicals called allylic sulphides. These act as antioxidants which might help to ward off cell damage, thereby helping to prevent cancer.



Garlic

Think oranges, and you think vitamin C, but that's not all this brightly-coloured fruit contains. Oranges are also a good source of fibre and folic acid. Of course, another plus is that many of the health benefits can also be enjoyed in the form of a drink: a glass of pure orange juice can even count as one of your five portions of vegetables and fruits each day.



Oranges

Popeye's favourite vegetable packs a wallop with its folic acid (good for healthy blood, nerves, circulation and pregnancy) and vitamin C content. Leafy greens – such as spinach, cabbage and spring greens – are also a good source of carotenoids and, when eaten regularly, might help to reduce the risk of heart disease and various cancers.

Spinach



superrecipes

"Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food." Hippocrates



Grilled salmon with mango salsa

(serves 4) 260 Kcals and 14g fat per serving.

- 1 large ripe mango, peeled and cubed
- 1 red onion, finely chopped
- 1 tbsp virgin olive oil
- 2 small chillies, chopped
- juice of half a lime
- 2 tbsp chopped watercress (and 4 sprigs of watercress for decoration)
- pinch of black pepper
- 4 medium salmon fillets
- half a lemon
- 8 handfuls of spinach (uncooked)

In a large bowl, combine mango, red onion, virgin olive oil, chillies, lime juice and watercress. Add some black pepper. Brush salmon lightly with virgin olive oil and a squeeze of lemon juice. Grill on each side for 5-8 minutes, or until cooked. Meanwhile, lightly steam the spinach. Make a bed of spinach on each plate, place salmon on top with a sprig of watercress and serve with salsa.

Sweet potato pancakes with carrot and onion

(serves 4) 250 Kcals and 6g fat per serving.

- 2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and grated
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 carrots, grated
- juice of half a lemon
- 3 tbsp cornflour
- 2 eggs, beaten
- pinch of black pepper
- 1 tbsp virgin olive oil

In a large bowl, mix sweet potatoes, onion, carrots, lemon juice, cornflour and eggs. Add black pepper to season. Warm 2 teaspoons of oil in a non-stick pan. Pour a large tablespoon of the sweet potato mixture into the middle of the pan and make a thin pancake about 5cm in diameter. Fit in as many pancakes as possible in the pan (without them touching). Cook for about 2 minutes on each side until cooked throughout and slightly browned. Ideal to serve with fish and vegetables or a mixed side salad.



Italian vegetable pasta

(serves 4) 385 Kcals and 7g fat per serving.

- 225g/8oz wholemeal pasta of your choice
- 1 tbsp virgin olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, finely chopped
- 2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes
- 1 red pepper, deseeded and chopped
- 300g/12oz chopped broccoli
- 400g tin kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 8 pitted black olives, sliced
- 2 tsp fresh basil, shredded (alternatively, use half a tsp of dried basil)
- 2 rounded tbsp reduced fat cheddar cheese, grated

Boil pasta until tender. Meanwhile, heat oil in large pan and add onion. Cook on medium heat until softened. Add garlic and cook for 1 minute. Add tomatoes, red pepper, broccoli and kidney beans. Bring to the boil and then cover and simmer for about 10-12 minutes. Prior to serving, stir in olives and basil. Serve with pasta and top with reduced fat cheddar cheese.



Apple, orange and strawberry surprise

(serves 4) 410 Kcals and 16g fat per serving.

Fruit filling:

- 1 large cooking apple, peeled and sliced
- 1 large orange, peeled and sliced
- 2 rounded tbsp brown sugar
- 225g/8oz frozen strawberries

Crisp topping:

- 100g/4oz rolled oats
- 5 Brazil nuts, chopped
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 2 rounded tbsp brown sugar
- 2 rounded tbsp plain flour
- 50g/2oz soft margarine

Natural yoghurt or low fat ice cream and a handful of sunflower seeds to serve

Preheat oven to 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4. In one bowl combine apples, oranges and sugar. In another bowl, combine oats, Brazil nuts, cinnamon, sugar, flour and margarine. In a baking dish, make a thin layer with the apples and oranges. Add a layer of strawberries. Place topping evenly over fruit and cook for 45 minutes. Serve warm with natural yoghurt or low fat ice cream and sprinkle some sunflower seeds on top to finish.



Food for thought

Did you know?

A recent survey carried out on behalf of WCRF UK found that more than half of those questioned did not know that eating a diet rich in vegetables and fruits could have a positive effect on their cancer risk. But the truth is: cancer is a largely preventable disease – and by enjoying a healthy diet, we can all help to prevent cancer in the future.

Preventing the ‘inevitable’

The harsh reality, as it stands, is that one in three of us will be affected by cancer. This is a shocking statistic – but there is hope. It’s never too late to live a healthier life, even if you were previously unaware of the diet and cancer link. So, read on and give your own health – and the health of your friends and family – the best possible defence against cancer. You can start by making sensible dietary choices such as including lots of vegetables, fruits and other plant foods each day.

The truth is out

There are, of course, many factors that can contribute to the development of cancer, and research is still being carried out to gain a better understanding of why the disease occurs. What the evidence tells us is that eating the recommended five or more portions of vegetables and fruits is the second most effective way to reduce the risk of cancer, after not smoking. Furthermore, following all of WCRF UK’s Diet and Health Guidelines (see page 1) – such as eating a healthy diet combined with healthy lifestyle choices, like keeping at a healthy weight and being physically active, could prevent 30-40 per cent of cancers.

Eating matters

There is convincing scientific evidence to show that eating a diet high in a variety of vegetables and fruits can reduce the risk of several cancers including mouth and throat, oesophageal, lung, stomach and bowel cancers. In contrast, research has also shown that a diet high in red meats, processed meats, salt, saturated fats and alcohol could encourage certain cancers to develop – so clearly, what we eat can play a big part in our cancer risk.

How much is a portion?

As a rough guide, one portion counts as: 2-3 tablespoons of most vegetables (like carrots, peas and sweetcorn); 2-3 tablespoons of beans (like baked beans or kidney beans); 1 large cereal bowl of salad; 1 apple or banana; 2 kiwis or satsumas; or a glass of pure vegetable or fruit juice.

But it’s best not to get obsessed with portion sizes – just aim to eat as many vegetables and fruits as you can!

Colour your plate

Variety is also essential. In order to get the best range of natural goodness from vegetables, fruits and plant foods, you should aim to eat as many different varieties as possible. The idea of creating a ‘rainbow’ on your plate is a good way to do this. By including more plant foods from each of the colour groups: red, orange, yellow, green, purple and white, you’ll be ensuring that you’re getting the best mix of nutrients for healthy living, every day. A good tip is to always make sure that your shopping basket contains at least one item from each of the colour groups.

7 day superfood diary

We hope you are now convinced that eating a healthy diet, combined with living a healthy lifestyle, can significantly reduce the risk of cancer. By now you probably have a good idea of the type of foods to include in your shopping each week, and we've given you a few healthy recipes to start you off. Your next step is to try to introduce more and more nutritious choices into your diet every day. One of the best ways of making changes to your diet is to keep a record of your improvements. Why not fill in this food diary for a week to keep track of how many superfoods you're managing to fit in? And aim to increase that number each day!

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				

Lyndel Costain



One of the main contributors to this booklet was state registered dietitian and renowned health writer, **Lyndel Costain**. Lyndel has eighteen years experience as a dietitian and nutritionist, both within the NHS and as a consultant. She regularly writes food and health articles for magazines including *Zest*, *Top Santé*, *Woman's Own* and *She* and newspapers such as the *Daily Mail*, as well as for health-related websites. She has also appeared on a variety of national radio and television programmes such as *Diet Trials*, *Watchdog*, *GMTV*, *Kilroy* and *Food & Drink*.

Lyndel won the Re-energise 'Health Professional of 2001' Nutrition award and is an active member of the British Dietetic Association, the Nutrition Society, Association for the Study of Obesity, Healthwatch, the Guild of Health Writers and the Eating Disorders Association.

As with all WCRF UK education publications, this booklet was reviewed by a panel of expert advisors – including scientists, researchers, dietitians and general practitioners.

Quiz answers



1 b – We should all be aiming to eat 5 or more portions of a variety of vegetables and fruits each day for a reduced risk of serious diseases such as cancer and coronary heart disease – as well as for improved overall wellbeing.

2 c – Surprisingly, red peppers contain more vitamin C per 100g. But kiwi fruit and oranges are also good sources.

3 b – In general, it's best to steam vegetables and to cook them as quickly as possible after preparing them. This way, they retain their flavour and nutrient content. However, lightly boiling and stir-frying are also healthy ways to cook them.

4 b – False. Fat, in small amounts is essential for our bodies. However, stick to unsaturated fats and oils like olive or rapeseed oil, and the essential omega fatty acids found in oily fish. And keep saturated fats, like those found in meats, cheese, cakes, biscuits and pastries, to a minimum.

5 b – We should plan our diet around plant foods like wholemeal bread, rice, pasta, vegetables, fruits and pulses. These are not only healthy choices, but enjoying a diet based around plant foods also means that you are less likely to eat unhealthy foods that are high in fat and sugar. Try to have seven servings of plant-based foods each day for a range of natural goodness.

6 d – All of them! By following the WCRF UK Diet and Health Guidelines, we could all be helping to reduce our risk of cancer. We could also be helping to fend off other serious health conditions such as heart disease, obesity, diabetes and osteoporosis.

7 b – False. Researchers believe that it is the wide range of different nutrients (and the ways they react together) – gained from a healthy, balanced diet – that is the most beneficial to our health. There is no evidence that taking supplements, instead of eating a healthy diet, can have the same beneficial effect. So try not to be seduced into buying supplements in place of eating your greens – your mother was right!

8 a – True! Diet and lifestyle can have a dramatic effect on our risk of developing cancer. By making good choices now – through eating the right foods, exercising, maintaining a healthy weight and not smoking – we could all live healthier for longer.

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK) is the only major UK registered charity dedicated solely to the prevention of cancer through healthy diets and lifestyles. WCRF UK is committed to providing cancer research and education programmes which expand our understanding of the importance of food and lifestyle choices in the cancer process. By spreading the good news that cancer can be prevented, WCRF UK hopes that many thousands of lives will be saved.



How *you* can help

The work of WCRF UK is funded solely by donations from the public. Thanks to the enthusiasm and generosity of individuals throughout the UK, we are able to increase public awareness of the links between food, lifestyle and cancer risk. By supporting WCRF UK, you will:

- Help to fund up to ten new research grants each year, awarded to leading scientists in the UK and around the world
- Receive WCRF UK's free quarterly Newsletter, which provides up-to-date information on healthy diets and lifestyles
- Have access to the UK's largest selection of free publications about cancer prevention, which give advice and practical tips on how to help reduce your risk
- Help to educate your children or grandchildren with a free Newsletter and special club for primary school children
- Have peace of mind that you are helping to reduce your risk – and your family's risk – of cancer, the UK's number one killer

By making a donation, no matter how big or small, you can make a difference. For more information on how you can help, please call our freephone number 0800 970 1461.

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“Stopping cancer before it starts”

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