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Seven Superfoods

In this era of modern medicine, it may seem natural to look to a pill or vitamin to improve our body's performance. However, the more we discover about our own body and its needs, the more we find that nature has already supplied us with many of the best performance enhancers. Here are seven superfoods designed to help you live longer and happier.



Yogurt

The benefits of dairy products are well established. Calcium strengthens bones and teeth and aids in the creation of lean muscle. The detriment is equally well established—dairy products are usually high in fat, which is what makes yogurt so special. No food so fully encompasses all of the positive attributes of dairy, while so clearly avoiding the one pitfall, as yogurt. Yogurt is not only high on calcium and low on calories, it also has a relatively high protein count.



Spinach

Typically, it's not a good idea to take nutrition advice from a man who always has a pipe in his mouth, but Popeye was right about the spinach. Spinach boasts a variety of health benefits. Spinach is loaded with antioxidants, which protect against cancer and other diseases, carotenoids, which improve eyesight and protect against macular degeneration, and lutein, which is also good for the eyes. So, in reality, Popeye's diet should have given him spectacular eyesight and an improved immune system, instead of bulging forearms and a stuttering problem, but who are we to question the logic of a cartoon?



Blueberries

Blueberries are small, but they pack a lot into their small package. They have a stellar blend of antioxidants that help clear your body of harmful elements. Recently, studies have shown that blueberries help protect against cancer, as well. Nutritionists aren't surprised. As a general rule, tough skins, like those seen on cranberries, apples, and blueberries, are nutritious. Additionally, any fruit with a rich color will typically have strong antioxidizing effects.



Pumpkin

When most people think of pumpkins, they think of the holidays, but pumpkins are a superfood that should really be included in diets year round. The main benefit of pumpkins resides in their carotenoids, which reduce the risk of serious, age-related eye problems. Carotenoids are also found in carrots. In fact, carotenoids are responsible for the orange coloring of both foods. However, pumpkins carry a secondary benefit: seeds. Pumpkin seeds protect against arthritis and lower cholesterol levels. And, of course, let's not forget—you can carve a pumpkin and put a candle in it, which is a lot more than you can say for a carrot.



Walnuts

Second only to fish, nuts have received the highest promotion, in light of the recent attention focused on omega-3 fatty acids. Nuts have all of the inherent benefits of high omega-3 counts--most significantly, reducing the risk of heart disease, but what makes walnuts so special is that they perfectly fit the definition of "a good fat." While that may seem like an oxymoron, the truth is that walnuts improve cholesterol levels. A handful of walnuts 3 to 5 times a week will be just enough to get the health benefits without ballooning. You can get too much of a good thing—especially when it's a good fat.



Turkey

The protein-first trend of the last few years has created a massive consumer need for protein-heavy snacks and meals, such as protein bars and shakes. Unfortunately, what most Americans do not know is that not all proteins are created equal. The protein found in 90% of these snacks and meal replacements will be soy or whey protein, both of which are inefficiently metabolized by the human body, compared to egg and meat protein. If you are serious about improving your protein consumption without drastically increasing your calorie intake, use nature's super-protein—the turkey. It is the leanest source of meat protein in the world. Additionally, turkey is loaded with zinc, which is a key component of a healthy immune system. Lastly, turkey contains multiple B vitamins, which improve nerve function and digestion. So, go ahead and give the other white meat a chance.



Salmon

It's been a great few years for omega-3 fatty acids. In just a short time, they have gone from an unknown aspect of our dietary needs to the top preventive measure against nearly every type of heart illness. Typically, one should be skeptical of such meteoric rises to nutritious stardom, but, in this case, the excitement is well founded, and, more importantly, well documented. In over a hundred clinical studies, increased intake of omega-3 fatty acids has been shown to lower the risk of some major heart illnesses by up to 50%. In the past 2 years, there have been disputed reports that omega-3's may protect against certain types of cancers. Omega-3 fatty acids are unique for one reason—they cannot be metabolized in the body; you must get them from an outside source. No source is more potent or common than salmon. The great news is that salmon works quickly, too. Recent studies have shown significant health benefits just 5 weeks after increasing salmon intake to 2-3 servings per week.