



5 Foods You Must Have in Your Diet... Now

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As a dietitian, I am often asked “What foods should I eat for good health and weight control?” While there is no single food or nutrient that is going to cure your fatty liver, diabetes, heart problems, or burn off your belly fat, there are some foods that are so nourishing and health-promoting that you would be remiss if you did not already include them in your diet on a regular basis.

Here are five easy-to-find and nutrient-dense foods that will help get you started on the path to eating right for your body and your health:

1) Cruciferous Vegetables

Cruciferous vegetables belong to the Brassicaceae family of plants (also known as cruciferae) and include broccoli, cabbage, kale, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, bok choy, arugula, radish, turnips, and mustard greens. Cruciferous vegetables are low-calorie and rich in fiber and several vitamins and minerals. Diabetics benefit as well - these foods help regulate blood sugar. Fiber helps not only with digestive health and regularity, but also promotes a feeling of satiety and fullness which prevents overeating. There is ever-increasing evidence that a higher consumption of cruciferous vegetables reduces the risk of several types of cancer thanks to the wide variety of antioxidants and polyphenolic compounds that they contain, such as vitamin C, vitamin E, carotenoids, and glucosinolates.

2) Coffee and/or Tea (in addition to water of course!)

When most people think of coffee and tea, the main benefit that comes to mind is the energy boost they feel from the caffeine in these beverages. What many don't realize is that there has been an almost insurmountable body of evidence supporting various other health benefits provided by the natural compounds found in coffee beans and tea leaves.

Coffee has been shown in multiple epidemiologic studies and clinical trials to decrease the risk of developing many chronic diseases such as liver disease, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

True teas are brewed using the leaves of the tea plant, *Camelia sinensis*. The most common caffeine-containing teas are black, green, and oolong teas. Herbal teas, technically termed “tisanes” are infusions made from herbs, spices, roots, bark, seeds, and berries of different plants (think mint, chamomile, or rooibos). Though all teas contain plant polyphenols that elicit different beneficial effects, the majority of the scientific evidence focuses on the relationship between true teas and human health. Drinking tea has been associated with lowered inflammation, improved blood sugar regulation, and blood lipid balance. The combination of



caffeine and antioxidant catechins found in true teas have also been shown to support metabolic health and weight loss.

Keep in mind though that adding excessive amounts of sugar or artificial creamers and sweeteners, which have many negative effects on the human gut microbiome and metabolic health, will essentially cancel out the benefits provided by these miraculous drinks.

3) Berries

Not only are berries chock-full of nutrients -- they're also available pretty much year-round, fresh or frozen, and can be enjoyed in an endless number of ways. These versatile fruits are delicious when eaten on their own, or added to salads, oats, or yogurt, or even incorporated into healthy homemade smoothies and desserts.

Consuming berries on a regular basis can improve your cells' insulin sensitivity, which prevents conditions associated with insulin resistance such as abdominal fat storage, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and fatty liver disease. These benefits stem from a combination of the relatively high fiber content and exceptional antioxidant levels found in berries such as blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, and strawberries. Berries are some of the lowest carbohydrate and lowest calorie fruits out there, and contain good amounts of vitamins and minerals -- particularly vitamins C and K1, and manganese.

4) Extra Virgin Olive Oil (EVOO)

Most people these days are familiar with the Mediterranean Diet or have at least heard of it. The Mediterranean Diet describes a pattern of eating that is commonly observed in countries around the Mediterranean Sea and has been connected with overall lower rates of disease and mortality. One of the key components of this way of eating is the abundant use of extra virgin olive oil in food preparation.

There is a lot of conflicting information regarding different types of fats -- saturated fats, unsaturated fats, animal fats, industrial seed oils -- but one thing that is almost universally agreed upon is that extra virgin olive oil is the unequivocal champion when it comes to healthiest fats. However, selecting the right type of olive oil is crucial. There are three main grades of olive oil: refined, virgin, and extra virgin. Extra virgin is the best and most minimally processed of the three, since it is extracted using natural methods as opposed to chemical solvents and is required to uphold a certain standard of purity and quality.

EVOO's fatty acid profile has been proven in scientific literature to reduce cardiovascular risk factors such as HDL to LDL cholesterol ratio, inflammation, irregular blood clotting, and damaged heart muscle and vascular tissues. The predominant fatty acid found in EVOO is oleic acid, which is a monounsaturated fatty acid. It only contains one double bond in its chemical structure, which makes it less susceptible to cell-damaging oxidation.



5) Fermented Probiotic Foods

Fermentation is a method of preserving food that has been around for centuries. At its core, the process involves microorganisms such as yeast, bacteria, or fungi breaking down the natural carbohydrates (sugars and starches) found in foods and converting those into alcohol or acids. The resulting products act as natural preservatives which keep the foods from spoiling and also provide a distinct tart and vinegar-like flavor. Common fermented food items include yogurt, kombucha, sauerkraut, kefir, and kimchi.

Foods that have undergone fermentation also contain natural, beneficial bacteria known as probiotics. In recent years, there have been countless studies detailing the health benefits that stem from probiotic bacteria in our gut and how they affect our body at a systemic level. These helpful little microorganisms aid with digestion and our body's absorption and utilization of nutrients derived from the foods we eat -- plus, they also help our body produce its own vitamin K and B vitamins! They additionally boost our body's ability to defend itself against harmful pathogens by acting as a protective barrier in our gastrointestinal system - which is the main component of our body's entire immune system. Our gut and our brain are directly linked through something called the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which allows our intestinal microbiome to influence our mood and cognition. Simply stated: healthy gut, healthy mind.

I consider these foods to be some of the healthiest on the planet due to their nutrient profiles and science-backed health benefits and firmly believe that any or all of them would make a significant contribution to our quality of life. That being said, I really want to emphasize that you don't need a complete dietary overhaul in order to make changes that will help you live longer and live better. It's really in the small shifts in our mindset and in our actions that get us where we need to be -- especially when it comes to our relationship with food. One of the easiest steps to take is to start trying out a few new foods and incorporating them into your regular rotation (and try to select whole, unprocessed food options). This way you don't make yourself miserable while you are working towards creating a better and healthier future.

For more information, visit Liver Specialists of Texas at www.texasliver.com, or give us a call at 713-794-0700.

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