

My Top Ten Favorite Foods

I hate to play favorites, but I must admit that sometimes I do when it comes to food. We all have personal faves, but mine are not only influenced by taste; a food's unique health benefits carry a lot of weight with me. People always ask me to compare the health profiles of particular foods and want my opinion of which "superfoods" are best. These are tough questions for a food-loving dietitian, especially since there is no single food that is perfect or essential to your health. After careful consideration, however, I've decided to reveal the ten foods that I believe offer superior health benefits, especially when they are eaten as a regular, if not daily, part of your overall diet. The best part is, these foods are delicious, too. The following are my ten favorites (in no particular order) and the health attributes that put them at the top of my list:



1 Dark Chocolate

Life is uncertain, so let's get dessert out of the way first! Cocoa, which should be the main ingredient in your chocolate, is the source of many wonderful antioxidants, such as those found in red wine and tea: polyphenols, catechins and tannins. Polyphenols are believed to inhibit cancer tumor growth, increase HDL ("good") cholesterol, and reduce LDL ("bad") cholesterol oxidation (LDL oxidation can lead to atherosclerosis). Catechins may help reduce the risk of developing skin, esophageal, and stomach cancers. Tannins in cocoa can help keep the urinary tract healthy and reduce cardiovascular disease risk.

Chocolate, like many other plant foods, contains fair amounts of magnesium, calcium, zinc, potassium, manganese and iron, as well as vitamins A, C, E and B vitamins. Unsweetened cocoa powder and

dark chocolate have the highest percentage of cocoa and, therefore, the most antioxidant powers, with antioxidant levels higher than fruits such as prunes and strawberries. Chocolate is high in calories, fat and saturated fat, but the type of saturated fat in chocolate is considered neutral in terms of its effects on cholesterol. The remaining fat in chocolate is monounsaturated fat, the healthful fat that is also found in olive oil (see #2 below). If you're going to indulge in a regular sweet treat, dark chocolate should be it. I wholeheartedly recommend a high-quality dark chocolate with at least 65% cocoa, such as those from *Valrhona*, *Scharffen Berger* and *Green & Black's* organic.

2 Extra Virgin First Cold Press Organic Olive Oil

Hooray for healthful fat! High-quality olive oil should be the main source of fat in your diet, replacing other vegetable oils, butter, margarine, partially hydrogenated oils, fatty

meats and deep-fried foods. This type of oil offers mostly healthful monounsaturated fats, as well as important antioxidants. Monounsaturated fats help lower LDL ("bad") cholesterol and raise HDL ("good") cholesterol production, thus lowering risk of heart disease and strokes. Emphasizing monounsaturated fats in your diet also appears to aid in the loss of belly fat.

Olive oil is rich in phytonutrients, which are believed to protect the heart and brain, improve cholesterol, lower blood pressure, reduce cancer risk and quell inflammation to help protect against heart attacks, strokes, certain cancers and Alzheimer's disease. Although any extra virgin first cold press organic olive oil is a good choice, I particularly love the flavor and quality of *Napa Valley* organic extra virgin olive oil. Use it for moderate heat cooking and for making salad dressings.

3 Salmon

There's nothing fishy about the health benefits of eating salmon—it really is brain food! Most people need to get more of the omega-3 fatty acids contained in salmon in their diet, as these fats can help promote circulation to and minimize inflammation of the brain, lower triglycerides and blood pressure and reduce blood clots and inflammation all over the body. They also play a significant role in the prevention of heart disease, depression, aggression, suicide, cognitive decline and post-partum depression. Omega-3 fatty acids are also vital to child brain development.

In addition to omega-3s, salmon is a great source of protein and vitamin A, and the bones of canned salmon are an excellent source of calcium. I recommend choosing wild salmon when it is available (salmon season is May through September), and



Our registered dietitian has a Masters in Public Health. However, she is not a doctor and her nutritional recommendations are not tailored to specific health problems. Consult your physician before beginning a nutritional program.

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canned wild salmon with the bones from *Deming's* is a great product. Other fish are also good sources of omega-3s when salmon is not an option—try anchovies, sardines, herring, black cod, tuna, whitefish and mackerel.

4 Walnuts

Nuts, especially walnuts, are a high-calorie health food, so eat them by the handful—not the bowlful—in place of crunchy snack foods, but they can help you lower your risk of heart disease and cancer. Walnuts are a unique nut in that they contain omega-3 fatty acids (though they are not as potent as those found in salmon and other fatty fish), melatonin and ellagic acid. Melatonin is an antioxidant that is associated with restful sleep and jet lag recovery. Ellagic acid (also found in berries) is a powerful cancer fighter, shown to kill malignant cells. The vitamin E in walnuts also helps fight off cancers of the lungs, breasts and prostate, as well as prevent heart disease. Additionally, walnuts can facilitate weight control since they are satisfying and can help normalize insulin levels to regulate appetite. I recommend that you add an ounce of walnuts or other nuts such as almonds and pecans to your daily diet. My favorite is the raw, natural varieties of nuts from *Flanigan Farms*.

5 Pulses

Dried beans are the best source of antioxidants in our diet, with red beans offering more antioxidants than blueberries! Pulses contain compounds that can help protect against breast and colon cancers, lower blood cholesterol and blood pressure, control blood sugar, and reduce the risk of heart disease. Actually, only part of the health benefits provided by pulses come from antioxidants; a lot also comes from their fiber content. Pulses are high in soluble fiber, which can help to significantly reduce cholesterol levels. Their insoluble fiber can aid in the prevention of colon cancer and promote regular bowel function. The total fiber content is great for diabetics and others who wish to control their blood sugar, since beans cause a slow, steady rise in blood sugar rather than a quick spike and drop, like some other carbohydrate-containing foods. Unfortunately, most Americans miss out on these health benefits since pulse consumption averages about ½ cup a year! Add more musical fruits to your



diet in salads, soups, chili and dips and reap their silent but powerful rewards.

6 Oats

Oats are considered to be the most satisfying of all breakfast foods. Oatmeal makes an excellent breakfast when eaten with some nonfat organic milk or soy milk, since they form the perfect combination and balance of carbohydrates, fiber, and protein, which makes you feel full quickly and satisfied for longer. This satiating benefit means that oats can help you control your weight.

Studies show that oats help lower blood pressure in hypertensive patients and can help prevent diabetes in those who are at risk. Like pulses, oats contain soluble fiber. I love oatmeal and granola as breakfast foods, since they are a satisfying source of minimally processed whole-grain carbohydrate. *Silver Palate* thick and rough cut oatmeal, *Bob's Red Mill* muesli and *La Brea Bakery* granola are three of my favorite oat products.

7 Cabbage

It should be no surprise that cabbage is at the top of my list of “super foods.” Cabbage is part of the *Brassica* family of cruciferous vegetables, which includes broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, turnips, kale, watercress and arugula. This mean green (and purple) food has a strong reputation for fighting cancer, due to its unusually high content of phytonutrient sulfur compounds called glucosinolates. Glucosinolates are considered “indirect”

antioxidants because they signal our bodies to make our own antioxidants. The antioxidants that we make ourselves are fantastic because they can be produced for three or four days after we eat a food like cabbage, whereas antioxidants that we eat tend to leave our systems in a matter of hours. These indirect antioxidants play an important role in cancer prevention, especially for breast, ovarian, prostate, lung, colon and stomach cancers. Lutein and zeaxanthin in these greens are excellent for preserving vision, preventing age-related macular degeneration and plaque buildup in the arteries. Additionally, cabbage is super high in vitamin C, an antioxidant that protects against cancer and helps with iron absorption, making raw cabbage a perfect accompaniment to an iron-rich meal (heat can destroy vitamin C). Try to eat cabbage or other members of the cruciferous family daily by adding purple and green cabbage and shredded broccoli to salads, making sauerkraut and cole slaw and using arugula and watercress leaves for salads and sandwiches.

8 Sweet Potatoes

You say yam, I say sweet potato, but we are in fact referring to the same food. True yams are not usually available in this country (they are native to Asia and Africa and can weigh up to 100 pounds), but the term “yam” is commonly accepted when referring to sweet potatoes. As long as we're getting our facts straight, sweet potatoes are

not actually a member of the potato family; they are part of the morning glory family. A lot of people only eat sweet potatoes around Thanksgiving, which is a shame considering that they're one of the most nutritious vegetables around. As you might guess from their orange color, sweet potatoes are high in beta-carotene and other carotenoids, including lutein and zeaxanthin. They are also great sources of vitamin C, B6, manganese, and dietary fiber. Beta-carotene is converted into vitamin A in the body, where it acts as an antioxidant and helps prevent cataracts and cancer. It also helps boost the immune system. One large baked sweet potato with the skin supplies 785% of your Daily Value for vitamin A! Sweet potatoes have been shown to help control blood sugar, so (contrary to popular belief) they are great for people with diabetes or insulin resistance. Bake sweet potatoes whole or slice them into rounds, brush with olive oil and roast until tender. Seek out sweet potatoes with colorful skin and flesh, such as orange, red and purple.

9 Pomegranates

The deeper the color of a fruit or a vegetable, the more nutrients it contains, and this fruit is no exception. These “jewels of winter” are deeply colored and packed with disease-fighting antioxidants. Pomegranates boast antioxidants that appear to work together to help prevent atherosclerosis and increase blood flow to the hearts of those with existing coronary heart disease. They have also been shown to lower blood pressure, stroke risk and LDL (bad) cholesterol. Perhaps most exciting is that pomegranates seem to inhibit cancer tumor growth in the colon, breast and prostate. Scientists are doing further research into these areas, as well as the anti-inflammatory, bone-preserving and joint health-promoting properties of pomegranates. Almost all of the research on pomegranates has been on pomegranate juice, which is more concentrated than the raw seeds of the fruit, but the seeds on their own are still quite healthy and loaded with vitamin C. Try the pomegranate juices from *Harvest* or *POM* and look for fresh whole pomegranates and fresh pomegranate seeds when they are in season.

10 Tomatoes

Okay, I have to admit it. Tomatoes have always been my favorite food, even

before I knew how healthful they were. As a child, I grew them in my garden and really came to appreciate their wonderful flavors and textures. Now that I'm a dietitian, I realize just how healthful they are. Several studies have linked tomatoes, especially cooked tomatoes, to a reduced risk of prostate cancer and other cancers of the digestive tract. A phytonutrient called lycopene is believed to be responsible for the cancer protection, and it may also protect against heart disease. Lycopene is made available in your body when tomatoes are heated with a small amount of oil, like in soups and sauces. It is also found in deep orange and red fruits and vegetables, like watermelon, red bell peppers, pink grapefruit, and apricots.

Aside from lycopene, tomatoes are an excellent source of beta carotene, potassium and fiber. Raw tomatoes are a great source of vitamin C. My favorite varieties of tomatoes are the Heirlooms. They are the colorful, strange-looking tomatoes that are not perfectly red, round, or uniform. Heirloom tomatoes are old-time garden varieties that have been grown for flavor rather than appearance. Try some Heirlooms this year if you haven't already and you'll know what all of my fussing is about. Additionally, there are more varieties of cherry tomatoes to choose from than ever, so toss them in a salad or quickly sauté them with some olive oil, garlic and red pepper flakes for a spicy topping for spaghetti squash or whole-wheat pasta.

If any of my top ten favorite foods are not yet a regular part of your diet, then I hope I have convinced you to add them to your daily rotation. These foods are healthful on their own, but just think of the health benefits that you could reap when you add all of them to your disease-fighting arsenal! Keep in mind that I've only highlighted ten foods, and ten foods do not a diet make. We need to eat a variety of foods if we are to derive balanced nutrition and satisfaction from our diets. Therefore, I recommend that you eat a rainbow of colorful foods each day (different colors can signify different phytonutrients). As I promised at the beginning of this article, all of these foods are delicious, and if you begin to eat them in place of other less nutritious foods that you may currently be eating, your appreciation for them will flourish—and so will your health.



Waist Watch

Knowing your waist circumference could help prolong your life. Recent results from the Nurse's Health Study show that women with a waist measurement of 35 inches or greater had a 79% chance of premature death compared to women who only had a 28-inch waist or smaller.

Women with the largest waists who had a Body Mass Index (BMI) of 30 or higher (which is considered obese) had the greatest risk of dying prematurely. However, the study also found that women with a healthy BMI of 20-25 and a large waist still had a very high risk of premature death. Experts believe that the results likely also hold true for men with a waist circumference of about 40 inches or greater. To measure your waist circumference, wrap a string around your waist just above your belly button and measure the length of the string—**35 inches or greater for women and 40 inches or more for men is considered risky.**

Excess abdominal fat is dangerous because it can cause inflammation and release harmful hormones and other chemicals that can affect your nearby organs. Previous research has shown that it also increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers and Alzheimer's disease for both men and women.

If you are at risk, I recommend that you try to lose some inches. Focus on limiting refined carbohydrates and sugars as well as trans fats, saturated fats and polyunsaturated fats (except omega-3s). Replace them with the types of minimally processed carbohydrates and monounsaturated and omega-3 fats discussed in this newsletter. Increase your physical activity and include both muscle-building and calorie-burning activities. If your waist circumference is below these threshold numbers, you can reduce not only your risk of dying early, but also your risk of developing many diseases of aging.

Food of the Month: Soy

Soy may seem new (or at least “new age”) to you, but this legume has been around for hundreds of years. In fact, soy sauce was first brought to this country in the late 17th century and today the United States is the world’s leading producer of soybeans! Despite its long and powerful presence in our food supply, though, there is still a lot that the public doesn’t know about this healthful bean.

Nutritionally speaking, research keeps revealing more and more health benefits that soy offers. It is an excellent source of protein, offering more protein than any other legume or plant food. This makes it the perfect substitute for animal proteins like red meat and poultry. Because soy is a plant food, it has the added bonus of being high in fiber. Soy also contains phytonutrients called isoflavones, which are believed to help prevent heart disease and hormone-related cancers, like breast and prostate cancers; in population studies, Asian people who eat soy products on a daily basis have lower overall cancer rates than other populations, especially when they start eating soy at a young age. These isoflavones are also believed to be responsible for reducing some symptoms of menopause, such as hot flashes, and to help lower LDL cholesterol levels, especially when eaten in place of other foods that are high in saturated fat. This substitution can also help reduce the number of calories in your diet, which is helpful for weight loss, especially for those with diabetes and heart disease. Furthermore, soybeans have been shown to lower women’s risk of developing type 2 diabetes when eaten regularly. Finally, emerging research indicates that soy is good for bone health. When soy foods are eaten as part of a regular diet that contains calcium, vitamin D and regular exercise, it can help prevent bone loss and osteoporosis. It may even help menopausal women gain bone density and help older women prevent fractures.

A serving of tofu or edamame beans is half a cup and contains about 100 calories and between six and 13 grams of protein. Soy foods can be a good source of B vitamins, copper, magnesium and calcium, depending on the form, ranging between 80 and 750



milligrams of calcium per serving.

Soy foods come in many different forms. There’s the well-known tofu, the popular edamame, the cow’s milk alternative soy milk, and the lesser-known tempeh, miso, and textured vegetable protein (TVP). Soy is an extremely versatile food, and is used for everything from its oil to its protein. However, not all forms of soy are created equal; it is best to eat soy in its whole, minimally processed forms mentioned above and minimize your intake of soy protein isolates, soy oil and other highly processed forms of soy. Also, try to choose organic forms of soy, since conventionally grown soy is usually genetically modified and heavily sprayed with pesticides.

Tofu is the most popular way to eat soy. Also known as soybean curd, tofu is made from the coagulated protein in soymilk that is pressed into blocks. It comes baked, smoked, marinated, plain silken (more custard-like and delicate) or plain firm (heartier and more spongy). Look for organic tofu and flavored baked tofu in the produce and regular deli sections at Gelson’s. Use silken tofu to make smoothies, salad dressings, and sauces; try firm tofu crumbled in place of ground meat for chili or tacos, cubed for stir-fries, and grilled in large slices.

Edamame, or young green soybeans, are fresh beans that are boiled and eaten from the pod. They were first made popular by Japanese restaurants, but are now sold cooked and ready to eat in our sushi and produce departments and frozen in the freezer section. Soy nuts are made from whole dried soybeans that are

roasted. Both make a great snack or meal accompaniment.

Soy milk is a rich creamy beverage made by pressing the liquid from ground soybeans. It is a boon to the lactose intolerant since it is lactose- and casein-free. Soy milk contains high-quality protein, fiber and little saturated fat or sugar, and some brands are fortified with calcium, vitamin D, and/or vitamin B-12, making it nutritionally comparable to cow’s milk. Use it in place of cow’s milk for cereal and in recipes. I prefer *WestSoy* organic unsweetened plain and vanilla soy milks because they use excellent ingredients and offer a great nutritional profile and taste.

Miso is fermented soy that contains healthful bacteria, like those found in yogurt and fresh sauerkraut. It can be used as part of a marinade or flavoring paste and in salad dressings.

Adding one to two servings of whole, minimally-processed soy foods a day is a good goal. One of my favorite soy dishes is my Sesame Edamame Salad in Gelson’s service delis. This month try my recipes for Cabbage Salad with Miso Vinaigrette and Thai Red Curry Vegetables.

Jessica’s Store Appearances Service Deli Food Sampling

West Hollywood

Monday, May 19, 12:00pm

Pacific Palisades

Monday, May 19, 4:30pm

Marina del Rey

Tuesday, May 20, 5:00pm

Century City

Friday, May 23, 12:00pm

Mayfair Hollywood

Tuesday, May 27, 5:00pm

Encino

Thursday, May 29, 12:00pm

Valley Village

Thursday, May 29, 4:00pm

Tarzana

Friday, May 30, 12:00pm

Jessica will be offering complimentary food samples and answering your questions about weight loss, food and nutrition.

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If you have any questions, please feel free to call Jessica at 1-800-GELSONS (435-7667) or visit our website www.gelsons.com for more nutrition information and store locations.