

# 17 Superfoods That Give You The Most Bang for Your Buck



By Dr. Joseph Mercola | [mercola.com](https://mercola.com)

Ideally, food is your “medicine.” It’s certainly one of the best preventive strategy I can think of, and getting more raw organic foods and healthy fats in your diet are key considerations.

However, while any type of whole food is better than none, some choices can give you more bang for your buck than others.<sup>1</sup>

For example, while lettuce is a staple in most people’s homes, even if they don’t eat a whole lot of vegetables in general, and many may even spend the extra money on organic lettuce, there are far more cost-effective ways to get higher quality nutrients into your diet.

Below are 17 of my personal favorites in no particular order, with some added cost-saving and nutrition-boosting tips thrown

in along the way.

## 1. Wild-Caught Alaskan Salmon

Research suggests eating clean fish like salmon, sardines or anchovies once or twice a week may increase your lifespan by more than two years and reduce your risk of dying from cardiovascular disease by 35 percent.<sup>2</sup>

However, the devil's in the details, and when it comes to salmon, it's quite crucial to buy the right kind.

What you're looking for is wild-caught Alaskan salmon. Steer clear of all farmed and genetically engineered varieties.<sup>3</sup> Virtually all salmon marked "Atlantic salmon" comes from fish farms, and researchers have shown [farmed salmon](#) may be one of the most toxic foods in the world.

Levels of healthy omega-3 fats are also reduced by about 50 percent in farmed salmon compared to wild salmon, due to the use of grain and legume feed.

Canned salmon labeled "Alaskan Salmon" is a cost-effective way to buy salmon, as it is far cheaper than whole salmon steaks. If you're not a fan of salmon, you can get many of the same health benefits by eating anchovies or sardines, ideally canned in water rather than olive oil, as inferior grades of olive oil are typically used.

## 2. Avocado

In addition to being an excellent source of healthy fats, [avocados](#) also have other unique health benefits, including enhancing your body's absorption of nutrients and inhibiting production of an inflammatory compound produced when you eat beef.<sup>4</sup>

They also contain compounds that inhibit and destroy oral cancer cells,<sup>5,6</sup> and being very high in potassium avocados will help balance your potassium to sodium ratio.

Avocados are one of the safest fruits you can buy conventionally-grown, so you don't need to spend the extra money for organic ones. Their thick skin protects the inner fruit from pesticides.

Another cost-saving measure is to keep them refrigerated. If you buy unripe avocado in bulk when they're on sale, storing them in the fridge will significantly slow down the ripening process and save a bundle.

Simply place however many you want to use within the next day or two on the counter, and they'll rapidly ripen.

### 3. Sprouts and Microgreens

Many of the [benefits of sprouts](#) and [microgreens](#) relate to the fact that, in their initial and early phase of growth, the plants contain more concentrated amounts of nutrients.<sup>7,8,9</sup>

As a result, you need to eat far less, in terms of amount, compared to a mature plant. Sprouts may be harvested within just a few days or a week of growth, while microgreens<sup>10</sup> are typically harvested after two to three weeks, when they've reached a height of about 2 inches.

Essential fatty acids heighten and the protein quality of several vegetables improves when sprouted. Sprouts can also contain up to 100 times more enzymes than their full-grown counterparts, and help protect against chemical carcinogens.<sup>11</sup>

Watercress may be the most nutrient-dense of all.<sup>12,13</sup>

Sprouts and microgreens are easy and inexpensive to grow at home. They're a particularly excellent choice during winter

months, when outdoor gardening is limited or ruled out.

Another major benefit is that you don't have to cook them. A simple way to dramatically improve your nutrition is to swap out lettuce for sprouts and/or microgreens in your salad, or on burgers, sandwiches or tacos.

Even a few grams of microgreens per day can “entirely satisfy” the recommended daily intake of vitamins C, E and K.<sup>14</sup>

## 4. Broccoli

Research shows this cruciferous veggie may reduce your risk for many common diseases, including arthritis, cancer, heart disease and more.

When you eat [broccoli](#), you're getting dozens of super-nutrients that support optimal, body-wide health, including fiber, the anti-cancer compounds sulforaphane<sup>15, 16, 17, 18</sup> and glucoraphanin,<sup>19, 20</sup> anti-inflammatory and free radical quenching phenolic compounds<sup>21, 22, 23</sup> and immune-boosting diindolylmethane (DIM).<sup>24, 25</sup>

Three servings of broccoli per week may reduce your risk of prostate cancer by more than 60 percent.<sup>26</sup> Sulforaphane also helps raise testosterone levels, inhibits the retention of body fat, helps detox carcinogens<sup>27</sup> and helps protect your muscles against exercise-induced damage.<sup>28</sup>

Ideally, choose raw broccoli, as frozen broccoli has diminished ability to produce sulforaphane. The enzyme myrosinase,<sup>29</sup> which converts glucoraphanin to sulforaphane, is quickly destroyed during the blanching process.<sup>30</sup>

Even better, opt for broccoli sprouts, which can contain 20 to

50 times more chemoprotective compounds than mature broccoli.<sup>[31](#),[32](#)</sup>

When using raw broccoli, steaming it for three to four minutes will optimize the sulforaphane content. Do not go past five minutes. If you want to boil your broccoli, blanch it in boiling water for no more than 20 to 30 seconds, then immerse it in cold water to stop the cooking process.

The sulforaphane content can be further optimized by eating it with mustard seed, daikon radishes, wasabi, arugula and/or cole slaw.<sup>[33](#)</sup>

## 5. Onions

[Onions](#) are another potent anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer food. Recent research shows people with the highest consumption of onions have a lower risk of several different types of cancer.<sup>[34](#),[35](#),[36](#),[37](#)</sup>

Research has also revealed that the stronger the flavor of the onion, the better its cancer-fighting potential. In one analysis,<sup>[38](#),[39](#)</sup> shallots, Western yellow and pungent yellow onions were the most effective against liver cancer. The latter two were also particularly effective against colon cancer.

Onions also contain compounds known to protect against cardiovascular disease and neurological dysfunction or decline. They also help prevent obesity and diabetes, in part by inhibiting certain enzymes in your digestive tract, and by supporting healthy blood sugar control.

Antioxidants are most concentrated in the outer layers of the onion, so peel off only the outermost paper-like layer. Overpeeling can reduce important antioxidants and chemoprotective compounds by as much as 75 percent.<sup>[40](#)</sup>

On the upside, the anti-cancer compound quercetin does not degrade when cooked over low heat. Store whole, dry bulbs in a cool, dry, dark place with plenty of air movement to maximize shelf life.

## 6. Spinach

Spinach is also rich in cancer-fighting antioxidants, vitamin K1 (good for your veins and arteries), magnesium and folate, the latter of which is important for short-term memory and helps lower your risk for heart disease and cancer by slowing down wear and tear on your DNA. It also contains more potassium than banana.

One caveat and contraindication: If you have calcium oxalate kidney stones, spinach is on the list of foods to strictly avoid, as it is high in oxalate. Also keep in mind that boiling the spinach will leach valuable nutrients like vitamin C into the water. After 10 minutes of boiling, three-quarters of the phytonutrients in spinach will be lost, so you're better off eating it raw, or lightly steamed or sautéed.

## 7. Coconut Oil

Coconut oil provides a mix of medium-chain fats, including C6, C8, C10 and C12 fats, the latter of which (lauric acid), is most well-known for its antibacterial, antimicrobial and antiviral properties.

The shorter-chained MCTs, on the other hand, are more readily converted into ketones, which are an excellent mitochondrial fuel. Ketones also help suppress the hunger hormone ghrelin, and coconut oil has been shown to aid weight loss and improve your HDL to LDL cholesterol balance.<sup>41</sup>

**[Related Article: Here's What Coconut Oil Can Do to Colon Cancer Cells in Just Two Days](#)**

My new book, "[Fat for Fuel](#)," explains many of the health benefits associated with a diet high in healthy fats, including coconut oil. Indeed, the [ketogenic diet](#), featuring low net carb and high fat intake, has been shown to be beneficial for many chronic health conditions, including cancer, and can significantly improve your chances of weight loss.

One way to save money on coconut oil is to buy it by the gallon. Big box stores like Costco also tend to have better prices on such bulk items. Unlike other healthy oils such as olive oil, coconut oil is very resistant to oxidation that occurs once you open the jar or apply heat, so buying in bulk is not a major concern.

## **8. Fermented Cabbage**

Cabbage tends to be inexpensive, and you can supercharge its health benefits by fermenting it, thereby also significantly extending its shelf life. The fermenting process produces copious quantities of beneficial microbes that are extremely important for your health, as they help balance your intestinal flora and boost your immunity.

These beneficial bacteria can even help to normalize your weight, and play a significant role in the prevention of type 2 diabetes, depression and other mood disorders.

## **9. Organic, Pastured Eggs**

Free-range or pastured eggs are a relatively inexpensive and amazing source of high-quality nutrients, especially protein and fat. A single egg contains nine essential amino acids, high quality protein, lutein and zeaxanthin for your eyes, choline for your brain, nervous- and cardiovascular systems, and naturally-occurring B12.

Ideally, you'll want to eat your eggs as close to raw as possible, such as soft-boiled or poached. Scrambled or fried eggs are the worst, as this oxidizes the cholesterol in the egg yolk. If you have kidney damage, you may want to discard the egg white. If you chose to use the egg white, avoid eating it raw unless it's in combination with the yolk. Eating only egg white could potentially lead to biotin deficiency.

Besides superior nutrition, pastured chickens are much healthier than factory farmed chickens and therefore have a far lower risk of producing eggs infected with salmonella. To find a free-range pasture farm in your local area, check out [www.eatwild.com](http://www.eatwild.com) or [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org).

Keep in mind that eggs sold as "cage-free" does not mean the chickens were raised under ideal conditions. They're not raised in cages, but they may still not have access to the outdoors. So, there are still significant differences between "cage-free" and "free range" or "pastured" eggs. To identify better commercial producers and brands, see the Cornucopia Institute's [egg report](#) and [scorecard](#), which ranks 136 egg producers according to 28 organic criteria.

## 10. Berries

[Berries](#) are loaded with vitamins, minerals and micronutrients that impart a host of health advantages. Importantly, their antioxidant power helps keep free radicals in check and fights inflammation. Some of the most important antioxidants in berries are anthocyanins, flavonols, ellagic acid and resveratrol, which studies say help protect your cells and fight off disease.

[Blueberries](#), strawberries, raspberries, cranberries and blackberries are known as some of the world's best dietary sources of bioactive compounds associated with a reduced risk of heart disease, neurodegeneration, diabetes, inflammation and cancer. One way to prevent waste – as berries can get

moldy within days if you don't eat them – is to buy frozen berries and simply thaw what you need. Frozen berries also tend to be less expensive pound-for-pound compared to fresh berries.

## **11. Kiwi**

If you need vitamin C, which helps support immune function, look no further than the kiwi. One medium-sized fruit provides 117 percent of your daily recommended intake. They're also a good source of fiber, vitamins E and K, potassium and antioxidants that help ward off chronic disease. Interestingly, kiwis have also been shown to help lower blood pressure.<sup>42</sup>

Acerola cherries are far better but they are not available commercially and need to be grown in subtropical environments. They are less than 10 percent the size of a kiwi and have more vitamin C. I have two trees that supply me with 50 to 75 or more cherries a day for about 8 months out of the year, which supplies me with many grams of a complete vitamin C matrix.

## **12. Raw Yogurt and Kefir**

While most commercial yogurts are little more than glorified desserts loaded with sugar, yogurt and kefir made from cultured raw, organic grassfed milk are a real superfood, providing an array of healthy bacteria that support optimal health, along with high-quality protein, calcium, B vitamins and even cancer-fighting conjugated linoleic acid (CLA).

If you want to know which commercial yogurts are healthy and which are not, refer to The Cornucopia Institute's [Yogurt Report](#). Their investigation found many products being sold as yogurt do not even meet the standards for real yogurt. The report also includes a comparative cost analysis of commercial yogurt brands.

The good news is many organic yogurts are actually less expensive, on a price-per-ounce basis, than conventional, heavily processed yogurts (although some of the organic brands of yogurt actually contained some of the highest amounts of sugar). Your absolute best bet – and also your least expensive – is to make your own kefir or yogurt using organic grassfed milk. It's a simple process requiring nothing more than the milk, some starter granules and a few mason jars.

## 13. Grassfed Beef and Beef Liver

Swapping grain-fed beef from concentrated animal feeding operations for organic grassfed beef is well worth the added price, as you get higher quality nutrients and less exposure to antibiotics and pathogenic bacteria. As for [organ meat](#), it is a nutritional powerhouse, loaded with vitamins, minerals, amino acids and other compounds vital to your health, many of which Americans are deficient in.

Liver is particularly packed with nutrients. In fact, it contains more nutrients, gram for gram, than any other food, including choline, B vitamins, bioavailable iron, vitamin D and CoQ10.

You can save money by buying directly from a farmer and then freezing the meat. To ensure you're getting the highest quality possible, look for the [American Grassfed Association's certification](#). Their website also allows you to search for AGA approved producers certified according to strict standards that include being raised on a diet of 100 percent forage; raised on pasture and never confined to a feedlot; never treated with antibiotics or hormones; born and raised on American family farms.

## 14. Grassfed Raw Butter

Butter, when made from grassfed cows, is rich in CLA, known to

help fight cancer and diabetes. Butter is also a rich source of easily absorbed vitamin A and other fat-soluble vitamins (D, E and K2) that are often lacking in the modern industrial diet, plus trace minerals such as manganese, chromium, zinc, copper and selenium (a powerful antioxidant).

About 20 percent of butterfat consists of short- and medium-chain fatty acids, which your body uses right away for quick energy. Real butter also contains Wulzen Factor, a hormone-like substance that prevents arthritis and joint stiffness, ensuring that calcium in your body is put into your bones rather than your joints and other tissues. The Wulzen factor is present only in raw butter and cream; it is destroyed by pasteurization.

Here, you again have the option of making your own butter from raw grassfed milk. You may also find unpasteurized grassfed butter at your local farm or farmers market. The next best is pasteurized butter from grassfed cows, followed by regular pasteurized butter common in supermarkets.

Even the latter two are healthier choices by orders of magnitude than margarines or spreads. Just beware of “Monsanto Butter,” meaning butter that comes from cows fed almost entirely genetically engineered grains. This includes Land O’Lakes and Alta Dena.

## 15. Mushrooms

A number of different mushrooms – including shiitake, maitake and reishi – are known for their immune-boosting powers. In fact, some of the most potent immunosupportive agents come from mushrooms, and this is one reason why they’re so beneficial for both preventing and treating cancer. Long-chain polysaccharides, particularly alpha- and beta-glucan molecules, are primarily responsible for the [mushrooms’](#) beneficial effect on your immune system.

They're also rich in protein, fiber, vitamin C, B vitamins, selenium, calcium, minerals and antioxidants, including some that are unique to mushrooms. One such antioxidant is ergothioneine, which scientists are now beginning to recognize as a "master antioxidant."

When it comes to mushrooms, make sure they're organic, as mushrooms tend to absorb and concentrate toxins from soil, air and water. Growing your own is an excellent option, but avoid picking mushrooms in the wild unless you are absolutely sure you know what you're picking. Some mushrooms are guaranteed lethal and have no known antidote.

## 16. Kale

The nutritional density of [kale](#) is virtually unparalleled among green leafy vegetables, boasting all essential amino acids and nine non-essential ones. One-half cup of raw kale provides 100 percent of your daily requirement of vitamin A, 340 percent of your vitamin K and 67 percent of your vitamin C. It's also loaded with both lutein and zeaxanthin, which are important for good eyesight. Gram-for-gram, kale even contains more calcium than milk.

***[Related Article: 17 Amazing Benefits of Our Favorite Green Superfood Kale](#)***

Like many other superfoods on this list, kale contains potent chemoprotective agents, including the phytonutrient indole-3-carbinol – which has been shown to aid DNA cell repair and slow the growth of cancer cells – and sulforaphane. Its anti-inflammatory capabilities have also been shown to help prevent and even reverse arthritis, heart disease and several autoimmune diseases.

# 17. Whey Protein Concentrate

Whey protein, a byproduct of milk and cheese, has been linked to a variety of health benefits, including:

<b>Helping your insulin work more effectively</b> , which helps maintain your blood sugar level after a meal	<b>Promoting healthy insulin secretion</b> , which is imperative for optimal health
<b>Helping to promote your optimal intake of proteins</b> , fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals needed for your overall wellness	<b>Helping you preserve lean body tissue</b> (particularly during exercise) as it delivers bioavailable amino acids and cysteine
<b>Supporting your immune system</b> , as it contains immunoglobulins	<b>Maintaining blood pressure levels</b> that are already within the normal range

Whey protein concentrate (not to be confused with the far inferior whey protein isolate) is an ideal choice as it's a rich source of amino acids.

It's also the best food for maximizing your glutathione levels as it provides all the raw materials for glutathione production (cysteine, glycine and glutamate). Glutathione is your body's most powerful antioxidant and has even been called "*the master antioxidant.*" It is a tripeptide found inside every single cell in your body. When shopping for a whey protein, be sure to look for a product that is:

- Cold pressed
- Derived from organic grassfed cows
- Free of hormones
- Toxin-free
- Free of artificial sweeteners and sugar

[Read more great articles at mercola.com](http://mercola.com)