

# 18 Foods That Help You Live Longer & Better (Some Will Surprise You!)



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

One of your most basic health principles is to *eat real food*. This will radically reduce your exposure to the tens of thousands of chemicals added to processed foods, most of which are not even on the label.

Many are still under the illusion that whole grains are good for you, but while this may have held true for your grandparent's generation, it's not true today. The thing that people tend to forget is that virtually all grain products you buy today have gone through industrial processing.

**[Related Article: 36 Foods That Heal Common Health Problems](#)**

Grains have also been altered through time, and growing

methods differ significantly from even a generation or two ago. We also prepare grains differently these days.

Sprouted whole organic grains may be the lone exception to my recommendation to avoid grains, but all those whole grain loaves of bread, whole grain pastas, and whole grain cereals – they're actually processed foods, and are best replaced.

You can read more about these issues in Authority Nutrition's article,<sup>1</sup> "Modern Wheat – Old Diet Staple Turned into a Modern Health Nightmare." That said, even among whole foods, some stand out as VIPs above others.

Health.com<sup>2</sup> recently published a list of 18 foods packed with health-promoting compounds like antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals known to play a role in longevity.

With the exception of whole grains and beans, I largely agree with their selection, which I've added to here.

## **Four Beverages That Promote Longevity**

Basic of basics: drink plenty of pure water. I believe the single most powerful intervention you can make for your health would be to stop drinking sodas and juices, and replace them with pure water.

Staying well-hydrated can also counteract many common ills, from minimizing wrinkles to reducing your risk for blood clots. Severe dehydration has even been shown to reduce your cognitive function and performance to a similar degree as alcohol, making you more prone to car accidents and other mishaps.

Certain types of tea and coffee can also have health-promoting benefits. Green tea, for example, has been shown to lower your risk of heart disease and cancer<sup>3</sup> when consumed at least three times a week.

Drinking four to five cups of green tea daily has also been shown to promote weight loss. Participants who drank this amount of green tea for four months lost an average of two pounds more than those who didn't drink green tea.

[Coffee](#) – while it could do more harm than good if consumed in excess or with added sugar, artificial sweeteners, milk, or creamers – also has an impressive list of redeeming qualities, including longevity.<sup>4</sup>

Research suggests coffee can lower your risk for type 2 diabetes, Parkinson's disease, dementia, stroke, and certain cancers. It also helps increase the metabolic activity and/or numbers of beneficial Bifidobacteria in your gastrointestinal tract.

The caveat here is to make sure your coffee is organic, as conventional coffee tends to be heavily sprayed with pesticides. Ideally use whole-bean black coffee – the darker the roast, the better. Roasted coffees are higher in neuroprotective agents than green (unroasted) coffees.

**[Related Article: Study: 3-4 Cups of Coffee Per Day May Cut Type 2 Diabetes Risk](#)**

One study<sup>5</sup> found that dark roast coffee restored blood levels of the antioxidants vitamin E and glutathione more effectively than light roast coffee. The dark roast also led to a significant body weight reduction in pre-obese volunteers, whereas the lighter roast did not.

Another beverage that can do harm or good depending on the quantity and quality is red wine, which has been linked to health benefits such as reduced blood pressure, cancer prevention, and anti-aging.

[Resveratrol](#) is the primary ingredient in red wine that gives it its health promoting qualities, and in my view, there are

healthier sources for this potent free radical scavenger than wine, considering all alcoholic beverages also have a neurotoxic influence.

Whole foods, such as muscadine grapes, for example, are a better choice. Muscadine grapes have the highest concentration of resveratrol in nature because of their extra thick skins and numerous seeds where it is concentrated.

Recent research<sup>6</sup> shows that resveratrol, taken in concentrated doses, may slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease. According to these findings, resveratrol appears to reduce the buildup of amyloid-beta in the brain by shuttling the protein to other areas in the body.

## **Nuts, Berries, and Clear Conscience Snacks**

One large-scale, 30-year long study found that people who regularly ate one ounce of [nuts](#) at least seven times per week were 20 percent less likely to die for any reason, compared to those who avoided nuts in their diet.

Eating nuts at least five times a week corresponded to a 29 percent reduction in mortality risk due to heart disease; a 24 percent reduction for respiratory disease; and an 11 percent reduction for cancer.

Raw nuts are an excellent source of healthy fats, which you need more of once you start cutting non-vegetable carbs out of your diet. They also contain plenty of valuable vitamins and minerals, and make for an overall great snack when energy levels are flagging.

All nuts are not necessarily created equal though. My favorite nuts are macadamia and pecans, as they provide the highest amount of healthy fat while being on the lower end in terms of carbs and protein.

[Berries](#) of all kinds contain concentrated amounts of disease-fighting phytochemicals known to boost your immunity, prevent cancer, and protect your heart.

They're also lower in sugar than many fruits so they're less likely to destabilize your insulin levels, making them another great contender for a quick guiltless snack.

## Dark Chocolate, Another Winner

Then there's chocolate. Provided you stick with [dark chocolate](#), gut bacteria will break down and ferment its components, turning them into anti-inflammatory compounds that benefit your health.

In fact, research has linked dark chocolate consumption to over 40 distinct health benefits, including longevity. As noted in the featured article:<sup>7</sup>

*"A 1999 Harvard study of 8,000 men discovered that those who ate chocolate as many as three times a month lived a year longer than those who didn't."*

The closer your cocoa is to its natural raw state, the higher its nutritional value; ideally, your chocolate or cocoa should be consumed raw (cacao).

## Healthy Fat Foods

Besides nuts, three other foods that rate among the highest in terms of healthy fats include salmon, avocado, and coconut oil.

- [Wild caught Alaskan salmon](#): Research suggests that eating oily fish 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.

If you want to maximize health benefits from fish, avoid

farmed fish, particularly farmed salmon, and even more specifically genetically engineered farmed salmon – especially if you’re seeking to improve your omega-3 to omega-6 ratio.

Look for “Alaskan salmon,” and “sockeye salmon,” as Alaskan sockeye is not allowed to be farmed. Canned varieties are an inexpensive alternative to pricier salmon steaks.

- [Avocado](#): Avocados, which are actually classified as a fruit, are rich in monounsaturated fat that is easily burned for energy. They also provide close to 20 essential health-boosting nutrients, including potassium, vitamin E, B-vitamins, and folic acid.

Clinical research has revealed a number of health effects of avocado consumption, linking it to reduced risk for cardiovascular disease and diabetes, as well as appetite suppression and improved weight management. It also enhances your body’s absorption of other nutrients.

***[Related Article: An Avocado a Day Keeps the Cardiologist Away](#)***

Researchers have found it can help optimize cholesterol levels within as little as one week, and contains compounds that appear to inhibit and destroy oral cancer cells, along with others that protect against liver damage. Besides eating it “as is,” you can increase your avocado consumption by using it as a fat replacement in baking; add it to soups, dessert whips, and countless other recipes.

- [Coconut oil](#): Half of the fat content in coconut oil is lauric acid that your body converts into monolaurin, which has anti-viral, anti-bacterial, and anti-protozoa properties. The medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil also produce a whole host of health benefits, including stimulating your metabolism.

MCFAs are also immediately converted to energy – a function usually served in the diet by simple carbohydrates – so like

avocados, coconut oil is an ideal replacement for unhealthy grain carbs. It can be added to smoothies, or used in virtually any dish calling for butter or oil. When it comes to cooking, coconut oil is ideal as it can tolerate high heat without oxidizing.

## Bring on the Veggies!

Vegetables contain an array of antioxidants and other disease-fighting compounds. Some plant chemicals can reduce inflammation and eliminate carcinogens, while others regulate the rate at which cells reproduce, get rid of old cells and maintain DNA. Leafy greens are basic staples with not-so-basic health benefits.

Researchers at Walter and Eliza Hall Institute's Molecular Immunology division discovered<sup>8</sup> that a gene, called *T-bet*, which is essential for producing critical immune cells in your gut, responds *specifically* to leafy green vegetables. Those immune cells are thought to play an important role in controlling inflammatory diseases, and may even prevent the bowel cancer.

According to the featured article,<sup>9</sup> eating one cup of cooked greens per day cut middle-aged people's risk of dying in the next four years in half, compared to those who didn't eat any leafy greens. Other power players in the vegetable kingdom include the following:

- [Broccoli](#) contains dozens, maybe even hundreds, of super-nutrients that support optimal health, including immune-boosting and anti-cancer compounds. Eating broccoli raw, as opposed to cooked, will help protect its nutrients. Broccoli sprouts are an even more nutritionally potent way to enjoy broccoli.
- [Sprouts](#) may offer some of the highest levels of nutrition available, including vitamins, minerals,

antioxidants, and enzymes that help protect against free radical damage. Many of the benefits of sprouts relate to the fact that plants contain more concentrated amounts of nutrients in their initial phase of growth.

Sunflower seed and pea shoots, for example, are both typically about 30 times more nutritious than organic vegetables, and are among the highest in protein.

- [Fermented vegetables](#): Almost everyone has damaged gut flora these days, unless you're part of the minority that eats a strict organic whole foods diet and avoids antibiotics. Fermented vegetables are one of the most palatable fermented foods that can provide you with a robust dose of beneficial bacteria, which are critically important for optimal physical and mental health.

Fermented foods are also potent detoxifiers, capable of drawing out a wide range of toxins and heavy metals, including some pesticides.

- [Tomatoes](#) are one of the best dietary sources of lycopene, which has been shown to have anti-cancerous activity, and may reduce your risk of stroke. Just remember to consume your tomatoes, whether raw or cooked, with some type of fat, such as olive oil, since lycopene is a fat-soluble nutrient.
- [Cabbage](#) is actually among the most potent medicinal foods available, and including cabbage as a regular part of your diet, at least two or three times a week, may offer many significant health benefits. It contains compounds that help prevent cancer, as well as high concentrations of antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds. To obtain the most nutrients from your cabbage, eat it raw, lightly cooked, or fermented.



## Two Disease-Fighting Seeds and Herbs

According to a 14-year long Harvard study, eating a bowl of [quinoa](#) a day may lower your risk of premature death from diseases like cancer, heart disease, respiratory disease, and diabetes by 17 percent. While it's often used as a grain replacement, quinoa is technically a seed, related to chard and spinach.

It's high in healthy fats and antioxidants, and is a complete protein, meaning it contains all nine essential amino acids. Just be sure to soak it for a few minutes, or ideally overnight, before you cook it.

Last but not least, herbs and spices of all kinds are potent superfoods, so go ahead and spice things up! [Garlic](#) is well-known for its healing powers, and studies have demonstrated more than 150 beneficial health effects of garlic, including a reduced risk for heart disease, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure, and various cancers.

Keep in mind that garlic must be used fresh to give you optimal health benefits. To stimulate the process that catalyzes the formation of allicin – which is responsible for many of its therapeutic effects – compress a fresh clove with a spoon prior to swallowing it, or put it through your juicer with other veggies.

## Controlling Inflammation Is Key for Longevity

The running thread linking a wide variety of common health problems – from obesity and diabetes to heart disease and cancer – is *chronic inflammation*. The key to reducing chronic inflammation in your body starts with your diet, and as you can see, the vast majority of the foods listed above tend to have anti-inflammatory activity.

The same cannot be said for processed foods, which as a general rule tend to be pro-inflammatory, courtesy of ingredients like added sugars, high-fructose corn syrup, soy, and processed vegetable oils (trans fats), and can contain some of the tens of thousands of chemicals that snuck through the GRAS loophole and are not even required to be listed on the label, despite the fact they've never previously been tested for safety in humans.

Replacing processed foods with real foods can make a significant difference in your overall health and weight, and ultimately determine how long you'll live.

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