

Functional Foods

Functional foods are foods that have health benefits beyond the nutrients they contain. In most foods, functional benefits probably come from several, perhaps many, food substances. Many fruits, vegetables and grain products have plant substances that may help reduce the risk for certain health diseases such as heart disease and some cancers. Although more research is needed to learn about the full potential of functional foods, it is clear that functional foods play a role in good health when combined with balanced food choices and physical activity.

Top Ten Functional Foods

1. Tomatoes—Several studies have linked the phytochemical lycopene which is present in cooked tomatoes, to a reduced risk of prostate and other cancers of the digestive tract. Lycopene, is probably the most powerful antioxidant among the carotenoids. Lycopene is released when tomatoes are cooked, so foods like tomato sauce, ketchup, and cooked tomatoes are loaded with this high vitamin C phytochemical.



2. Spinach- Although spinach has been getting a bad rap in the past, but the FDA now says that it is ok to eat. Good thing, because spinach is the most nutrient dense of all the green leafy vegetables! It is loaded with iron, folate (a vitamin B), phytochemicals lutein and zeaxanthin (chemicals which seem to ward off macular degeneration). One cup of raw spinach contains 41 calories and no fat!



3. Red Wine- Yes, that's right, one 4 oz of red wine contains super-charged antioxidants called polyphenols (resveratrol), which have been shown to boost HDL-Cholesterol (the Healthy kind). Red wine is good...like everything else... in moderation. Drink 2-3 glasses a week and you should be good.



4. Almonds- Almonds are probably the best nut you can have. They have a good amount of Omega-3 fatty acids, calcium, fiber, vitamin E and protein. These have been shown to help lower the risk of heart disease, cancer and increase the healthy (HDL) cholesterol.



5. Broccoli- Broccoli is the second green vegetable that is loaded with nutrients (just behind spinach). It is packed with phytochemicals, calcium, fiber, beta-carotene, and vitamin C. Eating one cup of cooked broccoli, according to studies, will detoxify cancer causing substances, decrease the risk of breast, colon, and stomach cancer—and it has more vitamin C than one cup of orange juice.



6. Oats- Oats, raw or cooked, help lower cholesterol. Oats may also help lower blood pressure and contain antioxidants such as tocotrienols. The dietary fiber and protein in oats will help make you feel full fast and longer.



7. Salmon- Salmon contains Omega-3's which are considered "good" fats that help prevent arteries from developing plaque. These fish oils also help lower triglycerides and "bad" cholesterol. Omega-3's have also been shown to block production of inflammatory substances in rheumatoid arthritis and lupus. Fish is called brain food for a reason. These fats help protect brain cells from age-related mental disorders such as Alzheimer's.



8. Garlic- Yes it does smell, but its nutritional punch is almost as powerful as its aroma! Scientists report that the phytochemicals in garlic help protect the heart and the sulfides in garlic reduce cholesterol. Some studies indicate that garlic may help with stopping or slowing tumor growth. In order to get all the health benefits, you need to release the compounds by mashing, mincing, or smashing the garlic.



9. Tea- Almost all tea is good tea, but the best tea would be Green Tea. Green tea is loaded with polyphenols, which have 100 times the antioxidant punch of vitamin C. So, when you feel sick go for a cup of green tea instead of a glass of OJ. Studies have indicated that green tea may help inhibit the growth of new blood vessels in cancer, may lower the risk of stomach, esophageal and liver cancers, inhibit cavity-causing bacteria, and heart disease. Those are just what researchers have found now. Who knows what they may find in the future?



10. Blueberries—and other berries- Any fruit with berries in its last name is a good fruit, but Blueberries are especially nutritious! They contain more antioxidants than any other fruit or vegetable. Blueberries contain anthocyanins, a powerful phytochemical that help reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. They have shown promise in studies on anti-aging and boosting brain power. Blueberries are the best fruit you can have!

