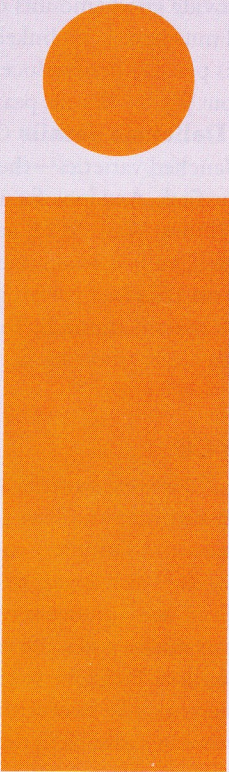


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12

bare essential foods

Eat these and you're covered!



f nutritionists had a reality show, the premise would be this: You live in a supermarket. Each day, you must vote one item off a shopping list until you're left with the most nutrient-dense foods, ones proven to fight disease. It's no mystery that chips and soda would get tossed. But picking among healthy foods, like berries and kiwis, is much harder. So SELF asked 37 experts (listed on page 181) to make the tough calls. The result? A dream team of super foods that will take you where you want to go—more energy for fewer calories and a body built to last. Turn the page to see which dozen should be the darlings of your diet.

Best fruit **blueberry**

Berry good news: This tiny fruit was a big hit with our panel, despite stiff competition from stellar choices like kiwi, cranberry, orange and cantaloupe. Its blue color signals a concentration of anthocyanins, a substance that may help prevent heart disease (cranberries have anthocyanins, too, but blueberries boast more). Like many fruits, blueberries also “contain phytonutrients like lutein and fiber, which reduce the risk for diabetes and circulatory problems,” says Joanne Shearer, R.D., a dietitian at Heart Hospital of South Dakota in Sioux Falls. **Delicious details** Blueberries are in season from late May to October. The rest of the year, head to the freezer aisle; frozen blueberries are nearly as nutritious as fresh ones. **Feast on this** Layer a saucepan with half a cup of blueberries. Heat on low for a few minutes, then pile berries on a toasted and lightly buttered whole-wheat English muffin. Sprinkle with brown sugar.

Best salad topper **tomato**

When it comes to crowning your leaves, the majority of voters picked the tomato. The red-hot fruit is rich in lycopene, an antioxidant that may protect against cancer. It also delivers vitamin A (to fight eye disease), vitamin C (which aids the immune system) and potassium (to help lower blood pressure). Carrots, green peppers, red onions and mushrooms also scored votes. **Delicious details** Keep unripe tomatoes at room temperature; fridge time can destroy flavor and halt the ripening process. **Feast on this** To get the most lycopene, eat tomatoes along with a bit of fat, says Lisa Young, Ph.D., adjunct assistant professor at New York University’s department of nutrition, food studies and public health in New York City. Try cutting tomatoes in half, scooping out the seeds and topping with feta cheese. Sprinkle with minced chives and parsley, basil strips, and a dash of salt and pepper. Broil for 5 minutes.

Best breakfast staple **lowfat dairy**

While other good A.M. options such as oatmeal, fortified cereal, eggs and fresh fruit garnered nods, lowfat dairy won for its wealth of calcium, a nutrient most women don’t get enough of, according to the USDA. (One cup of lowfat yogurt fulfills about 40 percent of your needs; milk, up to 30.) Dairy also does double duty by keeping you full until lunch because it provides a hefty dose of protein. **Delicious details** Yogurt’s live cultures help your body maintain a healthy balance of bacteria, which can assist in fending off yeast infections. These cultures may also make it a stomach-friendly choice for those sensitive to lactose, according to a *Journal of Dairy Science* study. **Feast on this** For a coffee alternative, heat 1 cup lowfat milk until it froths. Stir in 2 teaspoons nutmeg. Dust with cinnamon and sugar.

Best whole grain **wheat bread**

Maybe there *isn’t* anything better than sliced bread. Whole-grain wheat, in the form of bread, sandwiches key nutrients into your diet: A fortified slice has iron, B vitamins, vitamin E, fiber, magnesium and zinc. Most whole grains offer similar nutrients, but our panel praised bread’s crowd-pleasing features. “Whole-grain-wheat breads are an easy swap [for refined starches] as opposed to other grains, which aren’t as available and may not appeal to everyone’s tastes,” says Martin Yadrick, R.D., of Los Angeles. Smart slices contain at least 3 grams of fiber and list 100 percent whole-wheat flour as the first ingredient. Your payoff for going with the whole grain: a likely risk reduction for heart disease, diabetes and cancer. **Delicious details** Don’t skip the crusts, which boast more disease-fighting antioxidants. **Feast on this** Toast a slice, top with ½ teaspoon olive oil, diced tomatoes, a pinch of salt and fresh basil. For extra flavor, rub a cut tomato into bread after toasting.

Best snack **almonds**

If you’re steering toward energy bars and soy chips, you’ve taken a wrong turn. “Almonds have healthy fats, protein and fiber, all of which boost energy and beat hunger,” says Jackie Newgent, R.D., in New York City. Almonds edge out other nuts because they provide good amounts of fiber, vitamin E and calcium. But all nuts have been linked to heart health: Eating 1½ ounces per day may reduce heart disease risk. If almonds aren’t your joy, try fibrous peanuts or potassium-rich pistachios. **Delicious details** Opt for the whole nut as opposed to blanched varieties—the skin contains as many nutrients as the flesh. And look for almonds in their many incarnations: Andrew Weil, M.D., author of *Eating Well for Optimum Health* (Quill), uses almond butter as his spread of choice. **Feast on this** In a parfait glass, layer lowfat vanilla yogurt with roasted almonds. Top with a drizzle of honey and mix with a cinnamon stick.

Best protein source **fish**

Not only does fish offer some of the same benefits as red meat and poultry, reeling in B vitamins and lean protein, but many swimmers (like salmon and flounder) contain those celebrated omega-3 fatty acids, which appear to counter depression and heart disease. “Even one 3-ounce serving a week can help guard against heart disease and some cancers,” says Anne Dubner, R.D., of Houston. Pregnant women should avoid catches high in mercury, like swordfish, king mackerel and tuna, as high levels can cause birth defects. Everyone else can eat 12 ounces of any fish a week, as long as they’re consuming a variety of types. **Delicious details** When buying whole fish, check for clear eyes, brightly colored skin and flesh that springs back when pressed. **Feast on this** In lieu of a fatty sauce, add a splash of lime juice, then top with rosemary, sage or thyme.

Best treat chocolate

Dr. Weil singles out pure cocoa for being “full of antioxidants and low in sugar.” Many chocolate-loving panelists agreed. While it’s a stretch to call chocolate a health food, studies show that its antioxidants, called polyphenols, may help lower blood pressure (can’t you feel it lowering already?). Dark chocolate has more antioxidants than the milk variety, but proceed with calorie caution when eating any form. A 1.5-ounce Hershey’s Special Dark bar sets you back 220 calories. **Delicious details** Don’t look for polyphenols in white chocolate—it doesn’t actually have any chocolate. **Feast on this** Heat two 12-ounce bars of semisweet dark chocolate in a double boiler. Dip strawberries in sauce, plate and chill for a week’s worth of desserts. Chocolate-covered bliss, with the fiber of berries.

Best cold drink lowfat milk

This old-fashioned favorite beat juice and soymilk due to a pitcherful of advantages. In addition to supplying calcium, 1 cup of lowfat milk packs 8 grams of protein (you need about 50 grams daily) and up to 50 percent of your RDA for vitamin D. “Milk is also rich in conjugated linoleic acid, a type of fat that may help prevent diabetes and halt tumor growth,” says Dayle Hayes, R.D., of Billings, Montana. Plus, recent studies show that adults who consume lowfat dairy lose more weight than those who don’t. Now that’s a benefit worth milking. **Delicious details** Don’t worry about missing out on calcium by switching from whole milk; both lowfat and skim milk have just as much of the nutrient. **Feast on this** In a blender, combine 1 cup lowfat milk, a handful of ice cubes, 2 teaspoons vanilla extract and ½ cup lowfat frozen yogurt. Blend on high for three minutes.

Best hot drink green tea

Move over, mochaccino. This loose leaf is teeming with disease-fighting compounds. Its antioxidants may reduce heart attack risk and lower cholesterol. New research also finds that drinking green tea might cut risk for breast cancer. Studies show that the tea may even help ward off gum disease and cavities. Jittery about its caffeine content? Green tea has less of a kick than black (30 milligrams per 8 ounces compared with about 50). **Delicious details** These days you can find green tea in energy bars and ice cream, though most fortified foods may not have enough of the stuff to provide any measurable benefits. **Feast on this** If you’re not a fan of green tea’s woody flavor, try fruit- or ginger-flavored varieties.

Best preworkout snack fruit juice

When you need a jolt before hitting the gym, sip 100 percent fruit juice to squeeze the most energy into your workout. “Juice is less likely than foods to cause cramping when taken shortly before exercising,” says Sue Moores, R.D., of St. Paul, Minnesota. The fluid and carbohydrates in fruit juices provide the right fuel for a workout, adds Bonnie Johnson, R.D., of Las Vegas. Steer clear of blends that list sugar (or high-fructose corn syrup) as one of the first ingredients. **Delicious details** Good grabs include orange (with pulp for a bit of fiber), ruby red grapefruit (with lycopene) and cranberry (to help prevent urinary tract infections). **Feast on this** Juices are heavy calorie hitters, so consider diluting yours with one part flat or sparkling water to lighten it up.

Best green broccoli

Asparagus, spinach, kale—they’re all superheroes. But this incredible hulk is the most powerful veggie you’ll come across, partly because it has something the others don’t: the compound sulforaphane, which experts believe has cancer-fighting capabilities. It also contains calcium, iron, vitamin C and folate. **Delicious details** Eat broccoli within four days of buying. Otherwise you’ll notice the green’s mean side—a foul-smelling stench. **Feast on this** Steam 1 cup broccoli until tender. Toss with 1 tablespoon sweet plum sauce (available in the Asian foods aisle) or teriyaki sauce. Sprinkle with ground ginger.

Best comfort food cheese pizza

When you need a break from more serious eating pursuits, think pie in the sky. You can eat easier knowing you’re not necessarily skimping on nutrition with this favorite. Regular pizza eaters (one slice or more per week) reduced their risk for certain cancers by as much as 59 percent, finds an Italian study in a recent issue of the *International Journal of Cancer*. Researchers say that the lycopene in the tomato sauce is the primary health promoter, but a thin-crust slice topped with a handful of part-skim mozzarella cheese and a splash of olive oil is also the ideal mix of carbs, protein and veggies. **Delicious details** Save time on homemade pizza by rolling out refrigerated bread dough (found in the prepared food aisle of your grocery). **Feast on this** Add exotic toppings—spicy chicken, fresh artichoke hearts or roasted onions—for a more delicious and nutritious pie.

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To learn about other power foods, go to www.self.com and click on the healthy eating forum. Registered dietitian Janis Jibrin, a SELF contributing editor, will answer questions weekdays from November 3 to 14.